



WITHDRAWN



RIMBAUD

THE BOY AND

THE POET



SOME NEW & RECENT BOOKS

LAST ESSAYS.

By MAURICE HEWLETT.

BENJAMIN CONSTANT.

By ELIZABETH SCHERMERHORN.

THE DIARY OF OTTO BRAUN.

With Selections from his Letters and
Poems.

THE DIARY OF THE LADY

ANNE CLIFFORD. With an Intro-
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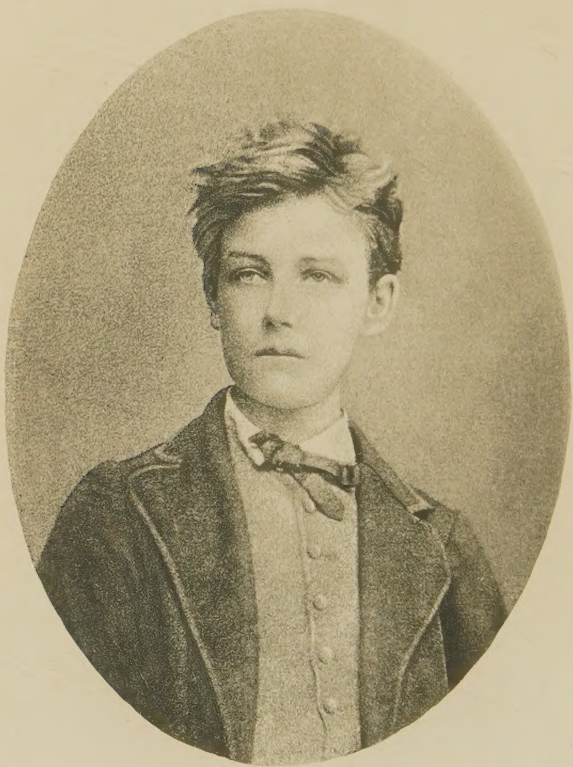
THE LIFE & LETTERS OF

WALTER H. PAGE.

By BURTON J. HENDRICK.



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Arthur Rimbaud,
at the age of 18 years.

RIMBAUD

THE BOY AND THE POET

BY

EDGELL RICKWORD



LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD

First Published 1924.

21635
PQ
2857
757Z
R53

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN.
CHISWICK PRESS: CHARLES WHITTINGHAM AND GRIGGS (PRINTERS), LTD.
TOOKS COURT, CHANCERY LANE, LONDON.

To
MY MOTHER AND FATHER

THOUGH in no way identifying anyone else with the opinions here expressed, I cannot but acknowledge the assistance I have received. From Mr. T. Sturge Moore, with permission to use his translations of two poems, without which it would have been impossible to illustrate a manner which is extremely characteristic of Rimbaud. From Mr. Desmond MacCarthy, whose encouragement was indispensable to the undertaking as his critical example was always a stimulation.

Towards my wife I am a more intimate debtor though I cannot at present properly express my gratitude for her sympathy and devotion.

E. R.



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PREFATORY

AT first as a legend and afterwards as a reality, the character of Arthur Rimbaud has not ceased, during the last fifty years, to excite enthusiasm and abuse. The originality of his work, though, attracted perhaps less attention than his absolute abandonment of literature at the moment when anything appeared possible to his genius. For this boy, whose verse brought into French poetry a responsiveness it had never known, wrote his last poems before he was eighteen and his last line of prose before he was nineteen. Then he burnt all the manuscripts he could lay hands on and for the eighteen years of life left to him wandered about Europe, and latterly became an intrepid merchant in North-East Africa. He only returned to France because of an accident to his leg, of which he died. He lived to be thirty-seven, but after his nineteenth birthday he referred only twice to the work by which his name will live, and then with disdain. He printed only one book, *Une Saison en Enfer*, a brief autobiography of his mind, just before he renounced literature. His poems and the poems in prose called *Les Illuminations* were found and printed without his knowledge. When he heard of this unjustifiable action he had been in Africa for some years, and at the news that his fame was spreading among the young men of the Latin Quarter he became furiously angry.

There is a pretty puzzle here which would be insoluble

if we considered Rimbaud at any moment of his creative power to have been a man of letters. He never regarded literature as a profession, though he had a familiarity with classical and modern literature remarkable for his years. He wrote always as a poet, to satisfy a secret impulse. When this impulse failed to find satisfaction in literature he had no interest to continue writing. He is said to have called his early work absurd, ridiculous, and disgusting, which shows that, as literature, it meant nothing to him. He took no pleasure in the perfection of its art, since it was to him an inefficient tool.

The impulse which Marlowe translated so superbly in the physical symbolism of *Dr. Faustus* was the same as that which tormented Rimbaud in a metaphysical hell. The desire for more power, more joy, and more entire perfection, in short, for the absolutes of duration and sensation which lure us in Helen's fabled face, is enough to damn a man to suffering in this life with no need for the metaphor of hell. And so universally true is the Faustus myth that Rimbaud, hypnotized by the idea of absolute perfection, rebelled against the gods of order and tradition and sought in unlawful means, in nihilism and destruction, the power which the normal faculties denied him. The part of pride in such a drama must obviously be a large one.

Because of the precocity of his genius and the compression of his work into three and a half years, and also because this work was almost always a direct transcription of a state of mind, the study of his life is of more importance than in criticism of most poets. He did not, after the first exercises of his pen, write a line

of impersonal literature; *his poetry was his life*. So it is really necessary to know that the most remarkable poems since the death of Baudelaire were written by a schoolboy in a small industrial town in the Ardennes, and with as much precision as possible the inner and outer circumstances of his life.

PART I
THE BOY AND THE MAN

I

CHILDHOOD

JEAN-NICOLAS-ARTHUR RIMBAUD was born at Charleville 20th October 1854. His father, an infantry officer, was often away in garrison and finally, when Arthur was six years old, separated from his wife, since each was of a proud intractable nature. The father was irritated by domesticity and the presence of children, but Madame Rimbaud determined to rear and educate her family with her own hands, according to her own precise notions of propriety. In these circumstances Arthur's childhood came almost entirely under the governance of his mother, her law was the first he knew and the first against which he revolted. The family numbered besides another son a year older than Arthur, sisters four and six years younger of whom only the second, Isabelle, is at all intimately concerned in his life.

His mother brought up her children in the purest tradition of bourgeois ethics, which is, in essential, the subordination of pleasure to duty; of everybody's pleasure, if necessary, to one's own duty. This stern religious woman, a pious Catholic, to whom sentiment was unknown, impressed her character most deeply on Arthur, the most sensitive of her children, and the stamp of it was never effaced.

His birth was portentous, it has been said, and his infancy prodigious, but we have no reliable testimony till his ninth year when he certainly displays a maturity, not of judgement, but of independence. For as soon

as he began to go to school, and was faced with the immense ascent to be climbed, he protested and rebelled.

Why, he asked himself in his earliest essay, why should he trouble to learn Latin? Even if it means a degree and if a degree is the only means of getting a good position—well, he doesn't want one. He will be a *rentier*. "As for Greek, the vile language is not spoken by anyone, anyone in the world. *Ah saperlipote de saperlipopette! sapristi!* I will be a capitalist. To become a shoeblack one must pass an examination. The positions they give you if you pass," he sneers, "are either those of a shoeblack or a pig driver, or a herdsman." It must have been a formidable child who, at the age of nine, could write such a vigorous and witty condemnation of a classical education and the system of competitive examination. "I will be a capitalist" he repeats again and again, and this, his first ambition, was also the dominating one in the later part of his life. After his school-time, when he was an exceptionally good classical scholar, he became more and more contemptuous of the humanistic ideal, but turned with energy to the modern languages and applied sciences—to all that would help him to earn an independency.

His disdain of the ancient languages and the salaried position was only equalled by his mother's respect for these institutions, and for the five years or so following his entering school she imposed her will on his, and kept his nose on the scholastic grindstone. Not a groan escaped him. For small offences she made him learn a hundred lines of Latin verse by heart, and if his recitation was inaccurate he might be deprived of a meal. His pious little sisters helped in the maintenance of this tyranny.

Under these conditions it is natural that his happiest moments should have been out of doors, on the pleasant banks of the Meuse, and when he writes joyously it is

always about the open country. He used to delight to get into one of the boats moored to the bank and dabble his hands in the clear water, or at other times to lose himself in the contemplation of its depths. On other days he paddled about on the bank and filled up holes with water, to which he would carry the little fishes and other creatures he could catch in the shallows. As he grew older his need of movement increased; he climbed out of the valley and explored the wooded heights above the town. In his quest of tobacco he would go even as far as the Belgian frontier, where he made friends with the smugglers. On all these excursions, for he was extremely susceptible, he absorbed a multitude of impressions which he transmitted to his verse and his prose, where they are often recognizable.

At the edge of the wood, where the flowers tinkle and shine, he sees the spirit of the country as a girl with orange lips, her knees crossed under the clear flood of sunlight, shadowed by the rainbows which traverse it, the sea and the vegetation which clothe it. The sea, though he has never seen it, is always present in his imagination as in that of all children from books and tales. He sees ladies on terraces near the sea, superb black children and giantesses, the flowers are jewels standing up in the fat soil of thickets and back-gardens after the thaw. There are young mothers and big sisters with their eyes filled with pilgrimages—sultanas, princesses with a tyrannical dress and bearing, little foreign girls and people quietly unhappy.

From this world, which he arranges at will, from these splendid toys, his mother's voice recalls him to hours of wearisome solicitude.

The *appartement* occupied by the family, by no means wealthy but not penurious either, *petit bourgeois* most exactly, looked out over the Meuse on to a landscape of hill and wood. On the bank was a boat-

building yard which is so delicately transferred to the poem, *Bonne Pensée du Matin*.¹

Or he walks out along the Flanders road. It is autumn and the gold leaves swirl round the house of General Noiset, who has gone to the South. Along the red road they come to the empty inn (this continual use of the definite article shows that it is a child's itinerary). The château is for sale, the shutters are coming off. The priest will have taken away the key of the church. Round the park the gamekeepers' cottages are empty. The palings are so high that one can only see the rustling tree-tops.

Magic flowers buzz in the hedges. Creatures of a fabulous elegance move round. A bird's song stops you and makes you flush. There is a bog with a nest of white beasts, a little carriage abandoned in the coppice, or which runs down the path, enribboned. On the road, through the edge of the wood, one can see a troupe of little players in their costumes. . . . In the end, when one is hungry and thirsty, he says, there is someone who drives you away.

There was, it is to be feared, always someone to drive him away from the unhampered enjoyment of his thoughts, and it was in the house that this discipline was most severe. There he was subjected to a concentration unnatural for any child, which made him irritable and drove him to revolt against all that his mother represented. Her religion and social ambition threatened to beat all joy and disinterested activity out of his life. When we think of the immense energy which must have been pent up in Rimbaud and the suffering that these years of restriction caused him, it is not difficult to understand the restlessness that grew upon him. A country walk meant, originally, a temporary freedom from his mother and all that she implied,

¹ See page 227.

and this association of liberty and movement, once formed, did not cease to develop, and its influence will be strong on all that follows. The only other way of escape was within himself, in the cultivation of his sensations and their applications to an imaginary evasion. Both go to create the freshness of this, one of his earliest poems, which shows us the sensitive and idealistic child whose nature underwent such strange transmutations in the course of the next three years.

*Sensation*¹

Par les soirs bleus d'été, j'irai dans les sentiers,
Picoté par les blés, fouler l'herbe menue:
Rêveur, j'en sentirai la fraîcheur à mes pieds,
Je laisserai le vent baigner ma tête nue!

Je ne parlerai pas, je ne penserai rien.
Mais l'amour infini me montera dans l'âme;
Et j'irai loin, bien loin, comme un bohémien,
Par la Nature,—heureux comme avec une femme.

¹ Mr. Sturge Moore's translation is printed on page 201.

II

THE PRIZE SCHOLAR

WHEN he was about twelve years old he celebrated a pious first communion. The first photograph we have of him, evidently a family one taken on this occasion, shows him seated rigidly, dressed in black with white collar and cravat; the hands, one of them clasping a devotional book, rest on his thighs, and a spotless white band is tied round the left arm. His hair, parted at the left side, is pomaded across the broad high forehead. The ears are ugly and protrusive. His square-capped boots turn upwards at the toe. The little expression left him in those circumstances resides in the deep-set, heavy-lidded eyes, and the possibility of mutiny in the thick fold of the under-lip. He was so hot a Catholic that he earned the title of "sale petit cagot" from the schoolfellows who retained their religious ardour within decent limits. Arthur drew this criticism on himself by attacking some big boys whom he saw playing with the holy water in the church. Gradually, however, his evident gifts earned him a kind of respect, and he was soon not only head of his class, but, in all subjects except the sciences and mathematics, of an altogether abnormal eminence. His capacity for production was immense and partly due to the faculty, remarked upon by his schoolmasters, of absorbing great quantities of raw material and almost immediately employing it as an integral part of himself. This faculty was at the root of his astonishing mental powers. The books, apart from those of his school-work, on which

his childhood was nourished, were few and worthless in themselves, but important in determining the trend of his nature. Before he was sent to the Grammar School at Charleville, till he was about eleven, his reading was confined almost entirely to the Bible and to a sort of Fenimore Cooper story illustrated by Doré called *L'Habitation du Désert*. Both these books appear to have been read over and over again and their influence was seconded by the few remaining ones we know him to have had, school prizes, such as *Les Beautés du Spectacle de la Nature* and one of the many French imitations of *Robinson Crusoe*. *L'Univers illustré* was subscribed to by his mother. The imagination thrives best on poor fare and nothing puts it so effectively to sleep as continual satisfaction. Arthur, poring over these books in his cherished leisure, dreamed, like nine children out of ten (perhaps no longer), of exploring desert and forest, of discovering strange tribes and cities, and this desire for the unknown, generally too soon subdued, became creative under the intensity of the boy's longing. Presently, out of the colourless snacks of these illustrated books and papers flashed the unanticipated universe of *Bateau Ivre*. Yet even in his younger days he had created, in stories of his own imagining, a world of escape from the oppression of his duties.¹ In *Les Poètes de Sept Ans* he has fixed his childish features most vividly. All that poem should be read, for in it the eager boy, with his sensuality at once delicate and gross, his tenderness and brutality and his immense nostalgia, is frankly portrayed. We see the mother, blinded by her pride in her clever little son, shut the lesson book and go away without noticing

¹ "A sept ans il faisait des romans sur la vie
Du grand désert, où luit la Liberté ravie,
Forêts, soleils, rives, savanes !"

Les Poètes de Sept Ans.

his disgust. Then, a hypocrite beneath his docile habits, he slips away to savour the musty darkness of passages or the sharp freshness of the latrines,

Il pensait là, tranquille et livrant ses narines.

He feared the gloomy December Sundays when, starched and pomaded, he was perched on a mahogany stool and given to read a green-edged Bible. He could have devised no better screen for his evasions than those blameless covers put so confidently into his hands. His mother would never suspect him then of enjoying himself, yet to one so suggestible as her son those pages must have evoked an inexhaustible succession of desert and mountain landscapes, of massive cities and oases; of migrations and visions. He owes a great deal to that green-edged Bible, in which he fingered most often the Pentateuch, the major prophets, and the Revelation of St. John; he tasted as well the pagan luxury of the Song of Songs and the marvellous charity of the Gospels.

From these books he would have received impressions without detail. Even the illustrated books were very unsophisticated compared with the modern educational series with their elaborate reconstructions and splendid photographs. Such as he had, of a kind which flooded Europe at the time in response to the demands of the newly literate masses, left much more to the imagination. I remember a book which had been won about 1870 as a prize at school, *The Wonders of the World*, in which the rainbow and the aurora borealis, icebergs and water-spouts, the plains of Tartary and the Great Wall, the Pyramids and the Siamese twins were represented by simple line engravings. From some such source Rimbaud drank at the age when impressions are most readily and deeply absorbed, and it was figures such as these he carried into the darkened room in which he

meditated his adventures and prophesied his restless destiny:¹

The rapidity with which he deploys form after form, always significant, always pure and unqualified, along his verses must have been intensified, if not induced, by those illustrated papers with which he quite consciously stimulated his imagination.² The sketches of palms and Esquimaux in *L'Univers Illustré* were not so far removed from the abstractions which are words. The reasoned appearance of the object does not seem to enter his consciousness, he feels directly he sees, and so, impatient of the descriptive faculty, concentrated many volumes into one. Hence, too, as we shall see later, the necessary search for a swifter style of writing which should, corresponding to his vision, impinge directly on the senses, and not, like the contemporary art, elaborately reconstruct the illusion of reality.

His literary apprenticeship was passed on the benches of the middle forms of the Grammar School. Of his early efforts in verse nothing remains, for it is not possible to believe that *Les Etrennes des Orphelins*, his first surviving poem, was not preceded by a technical preparation of some length. One of his earliest admirations was for Boileau, of whom, however, he wrote a severe criticism. He satirized the events and personages of the school-world in verses modelled on those of the

¹ " Il lisait son roman sans cesse médité
Plein de lourds ciels ocreux et de forêts noyées,
De fleurs de chair au bois sidéral déployées,
—Vertige, écroulements, déroutes et pitié!—
Tandis que se faisait la rumeur de quartier
En bas, seul et couché sur des pièces de toile
Ecrue et pressant violemment la voile! . . . "

² " Il s'aidait
De journaux illustrés où, rouge, il regardait
Des Espagnoles rire et des Italiennes. . . . "

Moses of Parnassus. His mother's discipline, to which the eldest son would not submit, fell with double severity on the promising Arthur, whom she propelled along the path, to her almost sacramental, to a university degree. The poor child was given extra lessons out of school hours by one of the masters, and whether from continual supervision or innate aptitude, he applied himself with a somewhat horrible, gratuitous intensity to the tasks set him. He would often bring his masters copies of set passages translated into Latin verse and French verse as well, or translations of Greek into prose and verse. He would sometimes write his essays in verse, or at least develop a theme, given for amplification, into an original poem.

Of his prose essays only one has survived, a costume-piece on the theme, *Lettre de Charles d'Orléans à Louis XI pour solliciter la grâce de Villon menacé de la potence*. It is a pastiche the most hardened scholar might envy, for its deliberate archaism does not conceal the sense of life he brought to his reading of the old poets. When he calls the judges of the High Court "ces terribles oiseaux noirs que suivent corbeaux et pies," or sets out the moonlight repast with which Villon quietens his famished stomach, or in such an observation as "La corde est bien triste en mai, quand tout chante, quand tout rit, quand le soleil rayonne sur les murs les plus lépreux," we wonder how an inexperienced boy can have drawn so much life out of a few books. For out of Marot and Charles d'Orléans, Basselin and Villon himself he drew the colours for his pictures and even more remotely from the *Gringoire* of Banville and Hugo's *Noire-Dame*, lent him by his form-master for this purpose. It is a clear illustration of a faculty of assimilation which has already been remarked on, and which will result in a few months in much stranger creations.

The pink-faced cherub who worked so serenely in

those classes which interested him, in others already exhibited the movements of revolt. In that of history, for instance, he produced essays praising the ferocity of Marat and Robespierre, whom he invoked as the heroes of the younger generation. His pride made him sometimes stubborn, as in that Latin verse competition when he would not write till he had been specially appealed to by the Head to save the situation. And he exacted a more material tribute to his superiority, saying shortly, "I am hungry," so that a special meal was brought to him in the examination-room.

In 1870 the Second Empire with Napoleon III at its head was visibly unsteady. The Republican press was extremely active and worked on the public imagination by recalling the deeds of the Revolution which had overthrown a greater tyranny. Out of the ruins of the Empire, it was prophesied, would rise the tricoloured phoenix in its threefold strength of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. "La République était si belle sous l'Empire" Forain said, and that is the beginning and implies the end of Rimbaud's excursion into practical politics. By this time he had definitely outridden the academic syllabus and was away without bit or bridle on the back of political altruism. Reading the historians of the Revolution he was naturally led back to Rousseau and drank deeply at the uncontaminated source of his idealism. Like Ophelia, driven mad by love, his spirit yielded to this revelation, and in one guise or another he came to see himself as the Messiah appointed to redeem suffering humanity. At the same time he was no vaporous idealist, and a well-forged logic linked his humanitarianism to the engine of social progress.

He was a little centre of revolt and propagated revolutionary newspapers among his schoolfellows. Grotesques of Daumier and caricatures of André Gill were labelled with the names of prominent Imperialists and

circulated along the benches. With his own hand, which had a certain talent for rapid and satirical sketches, he devised insults to the Government in power, or emphasized those in the cartoons published in his favourite journals.

At this time, the school year 1869-70, he had for form-master Georges Izambard, a young man of Republican sympathies and appreciative of literature. He, of course, gave special attention to the pupil who had in the previous term won the first prize for Latin verse and the second in Greek prose in the competition held by the University of Lille among many of the schools of North-East France. He gradually gained the boy's confidence, and was surprised to discover beneath the taciturn but docile scholar a being tormented by ill-defined revolts, aspirations quite contrary to those imposed on him, and an ardent desire for the sympathy which his surroundings denied him. Izambard talked to him out of school, encouraged him to read the classics and lent him books, even quite recent volumes published by the newly formed group of the "Parnasse Contemporain."

Rimbaud's first surviving poem was written towards the end of 1869, when he was just fifteen, and sent by him to the *Revue pour Tous*, the journal then subscribed to by his family. He was requested to shorten it by one-third of its length and complied with such rapidity that in a week from making the stipulation the paper had published the new version. At the beginning Rimbaud's literary ambitions were abnormal only in their precocity.

Les Etrennes des Orphelins, with one exception the only verses that he saw in public print, is a poem of sentiment, simply narrating the feelings of two little children who wake up one New Year's morning when their mother is dead and their father away. The technical accomplishment is already considerable. The

sentiment, too, is distinct from a schoolboy's clumsy tenderness; his detachment is so extreme, his mastery of his feelings so complete as to raise the doubt that the whole poem might be a dramatic exercise, destined for consumption by the readers of the *Revue pour Tous*.

Les tout petits enfants ont le cœur si sensible !¹

he says. The reader's feelings are worked on with strange skill, and the only lines of the poem one can point to as undoubtedly Rimbaud are those in which he recalls a child's impressions of home life, the mystery of a locked cupboard, the reflection of the fire-light on the polished furniture, and these suggest in a way the poem *Sensation*, which follows them in the order of time.

His earlier poems show him still assimilating the poets Izambard lent him—which included the French Romantics as well as the Classics, the great Latins and the satirists, and undoubtedly Sophocles and Aristophanes, at least.

Whilst he was thus, as they say, forging his instrument, he was reading more deeply in the history of the Revolution. He concentrated the idea of revolution, seeing it as it had urged the workers to revolt, a greed of life in those too closely oppressed which is the reality behind the economic and political explanations of the historians.

To say that *Le Forgeron* is superior to the Hugo of *Les Châtiments* is only as sensible as saying that an oak tree is superior to an acorn, for the former poem is derivative. It clearly shows the reading of Hugo and Michelet, but it has individuality. Each term of his indictment strikes home so forcibly because it has the air of having been lived through and reminds us that the boy who was shortly to respond to the socialist

¹ "Little children have such tender hearts!"

doctrines of Saint-Simon and Proudhon was already a critic of contemporary, as well as of historical, injustice.¹

His rapid summary of the abuses of the Monarchy, the courtiers, and the clergy, the fawning cowardice of the *tiers état*, the people's representatives, is more effective than pages of invective and strikes at the immutable elements of social tyranny. Certain lines have a cool composure which is in sharp contrast to the usual hysterics of the humanitarian adolescent. He has composed a great and lasting type of revolutionary in his figure of the blacksmith, drunken with terrible desires for the future of mankind, leading the workers to the triumph of their strength.

At the same moment that he felt the bonds of his intellectual submission relax he began to set about gaining his material independence. He soon saw that he had reached a point where his masters could not or would not, where his schoolfellows certainly could not, follow him. His egoism, so long exasperated by the maternal discipline, had now found in his poems an external justification, but the struggle for the freedom of his personality only then began. He very seriously regarded the labour before him. "What a job," he said to his friend Delahaye, "everything in my head must be blotted out. Lucky the child who is abandoned on the roadside, brought up at random, reaching man-

¹ "Or n'est-ce pas joyeux de voir, au mois de juin,
 Dans les granges entrer des voitures de foin
 Enormes! De sentir l'odeur de ce qui pousse,
 Des vergers quand il pleut un peu, de l'herbe rousse;
 De voir des blés, des blés, des épis pleins de grain,
 De penser que cela prépare bien du pain? . . .
 Oh! plus fort on irait, au fourneau qui s'allume,
 Chanter joyeusement en martelant l'enclume,
 Si l'on était certain de pouvoir prendre un peu
 Etant homme à la fin, de ce que donne Dieu!"

hood without any of those ideas inculcated by school masters or by one's family; new, clean, without principles or notions—since everything we are taught is false—and free, free of everything.”

Conscious of his distinction, he moved apart from the other boys of the school; his maturity could not communicate with their half-developed brains. They respected him, but they did not love him. The receptive and admiring Delahaye, younger than himself, was generally his companion on his long and frequent walks into the country.

“What makes me superior,” he told a group of school friends, “is that I have no heart.”¹ Or more exactly, he refused to submit to the sentiments as the arbiters of conduct, preferring to subdue them to the disinterested government of Reason.

He relaxed his efforts at school, feeling such matters to be now beneath him, but continued to read widely and variously. In spite of his idle hours, for when he told his mother that he was going to study at the Public Library he often went off along the delicious valley and up into the woods, he received first prizes for Latin speech and Latin verse at the inter-school competition in 1870. He won, too, many of the form prizes and it is related that, as the Franco-German war broke out at the end of this school term, some of the boys projected a petition to the Minister of Education asking that the cost of their annual prizes might be devoted to the exercise of the war. When this document in due course reached Rimbaud he refused to add his signature, and pointed out that most of those who signed it had no prizes to lose. Perhaps he so tenaciously clung to his rights because he saw already in those books the equivalent of a certain sum of money which would enable him to carry out his plan to escape to Paris.

¹ “Ce qui fait ma supériorité, c'est que je n'ai pas du cœur.”

At home he did not yet exhibit the same degree of independence. The obtuseness of his mother was her chief disciplinary weapon, for an intellectual revolt was beyond her comprehension. Her naïve vanity in the triumphs which appeared so trivial to her son was the cause of that shameful and disgusted air with which he received his rewards at this year's, his last, prize-giving. Whilst it must be recognized that she spared herself no pains to give her son the best upbringing in her power, the fact that she herself was not educated was unfortunate, since it gave her an excessive reverence for academic success. When she wrote to Izambard complaining that he should have lent Arthur such a subversive book as Hugo's (whom she spells " hugot ") *Les Misérables*, she says that she does not know how to thank him for all the advice he has lavished on her son and "*for the studies you have set him out of class.*" She wrote at the same time to the head master, and it was due to this man's good sense that Izambard escaped a reprimand for corrupting the mind of his pupil. Such squabbles, however, were not now in the same universe as that which Arthur inhabited. In May this year he was writing *Soleil et Chair*, almost his most splendid poem in the grand manner. It has its origin in those surreptitious wanderings along the Meuse valley, when steeped in the spring sunlight he lay and meditated the pantheistic philosophy suggested by the reading of Lucretius, made real to him by the sensation of his own surrender to the immense and multiform bounty of Nature.¹

"Read this as I wrote it," he tells a friend, "one morning, in the sun."

Into this vision of the physical world, the apotheosis of animalism expressed in forms created to satisfy the great desires of the ancestors of our civilization, the

¹ "quand on est couché sur la vallée, on sent
Que la terre est nubile et déborde de sang . . ."

modern poet brings his sense of deception and disappointment. He arraigns Christian morality as the destroyer of natural joy:

Oh! la route est amère,
Depuis que l'autre dieu nous attelle à sa croix.¹

the poet of *Sensation* takes another step forward along the path to pure and simple sensualism.

Chair, marbre, fleur, Vénus, c'est en toi que je crois.²

The world is perishing for lack of love and faith in love alone can redeem it. There is the principal weakness in the thought of the poem—he strikes the word “love” so frequently that it seems as if he is in doubt as to its content. It covers at least, besides the vague nymphomania of adolescence, an emotion at once mighty and delicious, an emotion already suggested by the word animalism (with no puritanical after-thoughts), the beauty of the harmonious union of man and woman idealized in a passage of this poem. And further than that he is struggling to express his adoration of Power in the figures of these divinities, that identity of Beauty, Power, and Right which he expresses in flashes—an extension of Keats' perception:

'Tis the eternal law
That first in beauty should be first in might.

“It would certainly be dangerous to permit him to read such writers as Hugo,” it will be remembered his mother wrote at this time, and I repeat it here to avoid having to explain at length the cause of the sarcasm and disdain he now began to manifest for the objects of her admiration and respect, for the ideas of the mass of society. He turned now towards the extremists in politics and the younger and adventurous men of letters.

¹ “Oh! the road is hard,
Since the other god has harnessed us to his cross.”

² “Flesh, marble, flower, Venus, in you I believe.”

III

THE REPUBLICAN AT LARGE

AT the end of the summer term France declared war on Prussia. Charleville was not far from the frontier, adjoining the fortified town of Mézières, and was almost at once cut off from Paris. From Paris came the books and papers in which alone, now that Izambard had returned to his home at Douai, Rimbaud found the stimulation or comradeship he craved. In Paris lived Banville, Verlaine, Gautier, and the others he admired, and there the Republicans were conspiring at the risk of their lives. Paris nourished him as the sun does the earth and suddenly a cloud shut it out. Rimbaud shivered in his solitude. This poet, whose mind we have seen in *Soleil et Chair*, whose exasperation already showed raw enough in that sonnet which describes Woman with those ulcerous

singularités, qu'il faut voir à la loupe

was obliged to join in family walks, to submit to the monotony of family meals, and even his country walks were curtailed. There belongs to this time a poem describing an evening in the public square at Charleville, where a military band is playing while timid bourgeois fiercely discuss the war, and the scene is made very neatly ridiculous.

A few days later than this, however, he wrote a letter to Izambard in which he expresses himself with his characteristic genius for invective.

He congratulates his friend on living no longer in Charleville, the most idiotic of all the little country

towns. Because it is next door to Mézières and because two or three hundred soldiers march through its streets, the people gesticulate with the notable ferocity of non-combatants. It is frightful, all the retired grocers dressed up in uniform! It is staggering and detestable how the solicitors, the glaziers, the tax-collectors, the carpenters, and all these pot-bellies, a rifle across the chest, display their patriotism at the gates of Mézières. My country is rising up! . . . I would rather see her sitting down. Don't shift your feet, that's my principle.¹

His irritation makes him ill, stupefied, furious. He had hoped in these holidays for days of bathing in the sun, for tremendous walks, for idleness, wanderings, adventures. He had hoped above all for books and papers which should feed his avid curiosity. But there is nothing, the post no longer brings anything to the bookshops. "Paris makes fine fun of us," he says, "not a single new book. It is death."

In the same letter he mentions that he has read the *Fêtes galantes* of Paul Verlaine. The atmosphere of these Watteauesque pieces and their elegant perversity and cynicism attracted Rimbaud, eager for any novelty anti-Charlevillesque. His earliest impression of Verlaine's work was that of slightly shocked delight, and he points out a line with the caesura in the middle of a word.

1

"Charleville, 25 Août.

"Vous êtes heureux, vous, de ne plus habiter Charleville! Ma ville natale est supérieurement idiote entre les petites villes de province. Sur cela, voyez-vous, je n'ai plus d'illusions. Parce qu'elle est à côté de Mézières—une ville qu'on ne trouve pas—parce qu'elle voit périgriner dans ses rues deux ou trois cents de pioupious, cette benoîte population gesticule prudhommesquement spadassine, bien autrement que les assiégés de Metz et de Strasbourg! C'est effrayant, les épiciers retraits qui revêtent l'uniforme! C'est épatant, comme ça a du chien, les notaires, les vitriers, les percepteurs, les menuisiers, et tous les ventres, qui, chassepot au cœur, font du patrouillotisme aux portes de Mézières; ma patrie se lève! . . . Moi j'aime mieux la voir assise; ne remuez pas les bottes! c'est mon principe."

He does not mention in this letter the project he was maturing, which, four days later, he was going to put into effect. Paris, the womb of revolution and mother of the arts, had become by now the centre of his desires. As poet and rebel he had even during the last term threatened to escape there, but his elder friends had dissuaded him. Now the war aggravated his imprisonment. In the month since term ended he had finished all the books Izambard had left in his lodgings, and of which he had given him the run. These alone had saved him from the absolute boredom in which he now sank. His elder brother, too, a typical product of his mother's peasant-stock, but caring as little as Arthur for her domestic government, had gone off with the troops, and he envied him. His enthusiasm was fired by political events and at this moment burst out in the fine sonnet invocation to the dead of '92 and '93.¹ But with him words were by no means a substitute for action.

On the afternoon of 29th August Madame Rimbaud led her two daughters and her remaining son for a walk in the meadows between Charleville and Mézières. Arthur made the excuse that he wished to return home for a book, but did not rejoin his mother and sisters. Neither was he to be found in the house, and his mother searched the streets of both towns till late at night, dragging her two little daughters with her, whilst rumours of disaster emptied every house and the German army was known to be approaching Sedan.

Rimbaud reached Paris with no money in his pocket and thirteen francs owing to the railway company. He had sold his school prizes before leaving, but such books are not of much negotiable value. Perhaps he had hoped to bluff it out, perhaps relied on the downfall of the Empire to permit a free passage to an ardent Republican. At any rate, handed over by the railway

¹ "Morts de quatre-vingt douze et de quatre-vingt treize,
Qui pâles du baiser fort de la liberté . . ."

officials to the police he expressed his contempt for the source of their authority in such terms that he was kept at the police station to await enquiries into his parentage and business. A Republican outbreak was feared and there was also the danger of German spies entering the capital; the authorities were nervous and feared to take any chances. The poems, too, which were found in his pocket were, in the eyes of the police, suspicious documents. It is not then surprising, however regrettable it may be for its effect on his development, that his first night of freedom should have been spent among the social garbage of Paris.

In the morning he was brought before the magistrate, but would not furnish any satisfactory references. In the first place it would have been useless to explain to an official of the Empire that he had come to Paris to assist in the proclamation of the Republic, or to expect any magistrate to countenance the existence of a living poet. And the last thing he desired was to give his mother's address and to be ignominiously returned to the home from which he had just escaped. His sulkiness in face of the magistrate's questions was perhaps after all the most sensible attitude he could have taken, but it did not save him from being sent to Mazas gaol as a vagabond and a political suspect. He recalls those days of misery in *Une Saison en Enfer*:¹

This was the first of the great shocks which unsettled the idealistic structure on which he had built his mind. Imagine the moral suffering of a boy come straight from the cleanly and refined air of his home, even though he hated it, into the squalor of a police station, and the nature of his companions. He did not at first understand the meaning of the revelation.

¹ "O l'affreuse évocation. . . . Je me revois la peau rongée par la boue et la peste, des vers pleins les cheveux et les aisselles et encore de plus gros vers dans le cœur, étendu parmi les inconnus sans âge, sans sentiment. . . ."

When the Republic was proclaimed on 4th September he felt that honour was in some degree satisfied and he consented to give the address of his home. His resistance too was weakened and he suffered from his disillusionment as to the nature of the struggle for the emancipation of mankind. By this time, however, Sedan had been lost and Charleville was cut off by rail from Paris. In his distress he turned to Izambard and wrote him a letter which unmasks the boy. He beseeches his assistance to escape from his predicament, "votre pauvre Arthur," and demands him to write "to my poor mother, to console her." None the less it is to Douai, and not to his own home, that he asks Izambard to take him. The schoolmaster did not hesitate to help the boy, supplied the money owed to the railway, and agreed to receive the runaway.

Rimbaud was apparently little perturbed by the time he reached Douai, and his behaviour satisfied the aunts with whom Izambard lived. Madame Rimbaud, however, wished to hasten his return; the local police were enquiring as to his whereabouts, and she wrote, "I fear the little fool will get himself arrested a second time before you receive this letter, but he would not need to come back again, for I swear that never in my life would I take him in any more. Is it possible to understand the foolishness of the child, he who is so good and quiet ordinarily?" It is difficult to blame her in spite of her harshness. The felicity of having borne a poet is generally posthumous, like that of the poet himself. Izambard put himself to a good deal of trouble to return the boy, for the ordinary communications between the two towns were dislocated by the war. It was about a month from the time of his flight that Arthur returned home and he found his mother's rule intensified. He submitted to it for about a week and then early in October again disappeared.

IV

THE VAGABOND

WHEN Izambard returned to Charleville after a few days, on his way to visit a friend, a master in the same school, in Brussels, he found a note from the distracted mother. The boy had gone out for a walk one afternoon and had not been seen since. He had, however, mentioned the name of a school fellow living at Fumay, a village not far off. Resigned to his part of the Good Shepherd, Izambard consented to follow this clue. He found that Rimbaud had indeed visited this friend, to whom he had explained that he was on his way to Charleroi to attempt to get on the staff of a paper owned by the father of another boy known to him.

Rimbaud walked by stages to the Belgian town, sleeping and eating where he could. The proprietor of the *Journal de Charleroi* received his offer without enthusiasm, but gave him an invitation to dinner. He made a not unfavourable impression on his host, though at dessert he expressed so eloquently his opinions of certain prominent statesmen, his anti-clericalism and socialism, that he ruined his chances of joining the staff of that cautious journal. His attempt was not so absurd as it may seem, for his powers of expression were already equal to any strain journalism was likely to put on them. Then, as in the rest of his ventures into the literary world, he suffered from the fact that his outward appearance was that of an unruly schoolboy. His social training was of the plebeian kind which maintains the relations too nearly to the personal to permit the

possibility of easy intercourse. The inability to modulate, in company, his personality was one of the principal causes of the ill-feeling he excited among even kind and fair-minded persons.

He was next heard of in Brussels, where he arrived torn and weary, having walked and begged his way right from Charleroi. He called there at the house of one of his schoolmasters, to whom he was known only as an exemplary scholar. This was the one Izambard intended to visit, and acting on what he had been told of his friend's movements at Douai, he announced himself as a sort of John the Baptist. He was washed, fed, and given a clean collar and a handful of money. Soon after he had left Izambard arrived, having lost track of the fugitive at Charleroi. Izambard's surprise at hearing that he had been before him in Brussels was not so great as his astonishment to find, on his return to Douai, Rimbaud re-established among his aunts. "C'est-moi, je suis revenu," he had explained to those hospitable women.

With the money given him in Brussels he had taken the train straight to Douai. The call of the road had been for the moment silenced by his long trek from Charleroi, and now he was occupied in rhyming the experiences of his vagabondage. He was not disturbed by the discussion of his return home. He was comfortable, the supply of good paper was adequate, and at the least blemish in his copy of a poem he re-copied it. He was, it may be surmised, preparing a volume. "Why don't you write on both sides of the paper?" enquired the more economical of the aunts. "For the printer," he answered seriously, "one never writes on the back."

His mother's demands, however, became insistent and perhaps, too, his welcome was wearing a little thin. At the end of the month Izambard chose the most

sensible course; he put his young visitor in the care of the police and went with him to the railway station, whence he was despatched to the next district, and so home. On the way to the train Izambard gave him the advice of a reasonable man; he told him that he should obey his mother and win the respect to which he was certainly entitled by means of patience and perseverance. "I have the impression," he says, "that he understood me, that he was inwardly moved, that his heart was touched. Perhaps I deceive myself. . . . He is so impenetrable!"

There is no doubt that the boy was moved by his friend's treatment of him; he wrote gratefully to him a few days after his return. But, he also writes, "I am dying, I am decaying in platitude, evil-mindedness, and sameness." His taste of freedom has increased his hatred of control. "I should have gone away again to-day even; I could have done. I had all new clothes, I would have sold my watch and long live freedom! But I stayed! I stayed! and so many times I wanted to go off again. . . . But I will stay, I will stay. I did not promise that but I will do it to deserve your affection. . . . I can no more express my gratitude to you than I could the other day; I will prove it to you. . . . It is a matter of doing something for you and I would die to do it. . . . *Ce 'sans-cœur' de A. RIMBAUD.*"

His irritability, quenched towards Izambard, breaks out in a postscript denouncing the behaviour of his fellow townsmen. "Abominable prurigo d'idiotisme,¹ tel est l'esprit de la population." The school was closed, being in use as a hospital for wounded, and Rimbaud was free to read whatever the Public Library could give him. His mother having decided to send him to school as a boarder at the beginning of the year, and aware now

¹ Notice once again his natural genius for the language of abuse. In sound alone his words express disgust.

that her son was not to be broken in by force, found her restrictions ignored. At the New Year Mézières was bombarded and a number of civilians killed. Rimbaud's most impressionable year was marked by oppression, bloodshed, and violence; and he must have noted that the State practised freely that which was most condemned in the individual. None the less he was at this time a believer in universal progress, a mood which in fact it was almost impossible to escape, in those days, when the theory of evolution provided the springboard for so many parabolics. Delahaye tells us that Rimbaud thought war would be gradually eradicated. After the fall of Mézières, German soldiers were billeted in the town, and the two friends went one day to watch a review of the victorious troops. The efficiency Delahaye noted with admiration was the subject of a tirade by Rimbaud, who foresaw the German people turned into a nation of slaves serving the military machine. Their superior amenability to discipline, which won them the war, was, he said, the mark of their inferiority. "Because of that, in relation to us, the vanquished," he said, "they are backward, outdistanced, positively inferior." In the same conversation he condemned all military ambitions of whatever nation. His elder brother arrived home on leave from the front about this time and Arthur amused himself by cheeking the patriot. "Tu me dégoûtes" was the young soldier's only reply, and it was not displeasing to Arthur.

From November 1870 to February 1871 his life was outwardly uneventful. He consolidated the advances he had made towards independence, and by his manners and bearing conveyed his disregard for the opinion of the burghers of Charleville. He was marked as a boy who had dared to challenge the system of values of his fellow townsmen, and who had got into prison for his pains. No doubt the good people remembered that they fore-

boded ill of his extreme cleverness—to them unnatural black magic. So Rimbaud was pushed by his pride still farther along the path he had half unconsciously chosen.

He grumbled at the heroic defence of Paris because it was silly to prolong a useless struggle which kept him fretting in Charleville. As soon as the siege was raised he sold his watch and took a ticket for the capital, arriving there for the second time on 25th February. He knew no one and had no money, but he was still a rather doctrinaire Communist and expected to receive sufficient help from intellectual sympathizers to enable him to live till he could find employment. We have already mentioned his admiration for the caricatures of André Gill, an artist and rhymist of Republican sympathies, and having found his address it was him he first approached. Gill was out, but he had left the key somewhere within reach, so Rimbaud in his care-free way went in and stretched himself on a settle to sleep. Gill returned to find this strange overgrown boy snoring in his lobby, shook him, and asked his business. Rimbaud rubbed his eyes with large red hands and grumbled at being wakened from an interesting dream. On persuasion he explained that he was there because of his desire to take a part in events, to write and to prophesy. At present, Gill informed him, the people of Paris, after a lengthy siege, were more than ever occupied in filling their stomachs at the expense of their minds. He gave him ten francs and the advice to return home.

Rimbaud took the money but not the advice. He struggled to live in Paris for about a fortnight, a fortnight of winter, by sleeping under bridges and in coal-barges, and picking what food he could from the garbage put outside the doors in the early morning. There is a legend that Gill let him sleep in his studio for some time (which is likely enough), but that one

night he locked Gill out and forced him to spend the night on his own door mat. It is hard to see what should have made Rimbaud so act against his own interests.

For a fortnight he wandered about the streets absorbing the novel spectacle of the great city which, like Hugo and Baudelaire, he had worshipped for so long. He loved it for its inexhaustible variety, its indifference, its brutality. For the anonymity which, like an invisible cloak, permits splendid liberties.

In the windows of the bookshops which he scrutinized he saw nothing he cared to describe with admiration. A Leconte de Lisle, a Mendés, a Coppée, a Glatigny, and several books by less known minor writers are mentioned with a sinister absence of comment. Every publisher has his *Siège*, or *Journal du Siège*, and that of Sarcey is in its fourteenth edition. Above all, he is pleased by the comic drawings of Draner and Faustin. The theatres are the abomination of desolation, but he admired the *fantaisies* of Vallés and Vermersh (Communists) in the *Cri du Peuple*.

So much for the world of letters from 25th February to 10th March; he concludes in the letter from which these details have been extracted, "and may Belgian literature tuck us under its arm." Not a word of his hunger and poverty during his visit. Was he too proud to mention it, or had he other resources than those mentioned above? He writes that he had called at a publisher's to find the address of Vermersh, a Communist leader; but he does not say that he established any connection. More than a year later, in London, where Vermersh had fled after the Commune, they did at least meet.

It is certain that nothing but starvation would have forced Rimbaud to submit to defeat and return to Charleville a second time. Ragged and coughing he

arrived home one night, on foot, having by his inner strength been sustained on that dreadful journey of 160 miles.

It has been variously related that he managed to get food and shelter on his journeys by passing himself off as a *franc-tireur*, and that if no private family would run the risk of lodging him, he had the audacity to demand these things from the mayor of the village, or that otherwise he pushed into a house on the chance of finding an empty bed and tumbled into it. The former explanation sounds too indirect for Rimbaud habitually to have used, the latter is more in keeping with the injunction with which he encouraged his timidity, "entre partout, réponds à tout. On ne te tuera pas plus que si tu étais cadavre." He pushed the pretensions of charity to their logical conclusions, and not with uniform success. One morning, as he was going to get into a bed in a house he had entered, he was unfortunately seen by a farm hand whose idea of hospitality did not correspond with his own.

V

THE REBEL

THE next month or so was one of purely intellectual activity. He devoted himself to that destruction of prejudices which he had conceived to be his duty more than a year before, which he expressed to Delahaye in the remarks we have quoted about the child of nature. The ideas of pleasure and pain were the first to be examined, and he undertook the revaluation of values as the poet's first task. Pleasures, particularly the delights most highly praised by the people he knew and despised, were naturally suspect.

He no longer knew the gaiety of his first freedom, and the frank enjoyment of dewy nights on the roads, and coarse meals eaten hungry in strange inns, and mischievous, big-breasted servant girls. He was no longer the amorous libertine of

Elle était fort déshabillée,
Et de grands arbres indiscrets . . .

or the youthful *flâneur* of *Roman*, lounging with his bock or lemonade in the cafés of the promenade. In March he would not write:

On n'est pas sérieux quand on a dix-sept ans
Et qu'on a des tilleuls verts sur la promenade.

He was only sixteen, but he was immensely serious. He knew now no frivolous dissipations. He turned with fury on the sweethearts who had, by bringing him to desire them, reduced him to the level of the abominated Musset,

Je voudrais vous cassez les hanches,
D'avoir aimé !

He increased his reading with a savage and unfastidious appetite—books on magic, eighteenth-century librettos, Eastern legends, science, and philosophy jostled one another in his head. The aged librarian did not supply his needs with sufficient alacrity, was indeed disgruntled by this display of unexampled curiosity which obliged him to search remote shelves for the satisfaction of a young ruffian. In Rimbaud's acquisitive frenzy the least delay roused his fury and if, as it is said, the librarian sometimes hid himself to avoid giving books to Rimbaud, the invective of *Les Assis* is hardly too severe. That satire has been justly admired, and it would be hard to find its equal in vigour later than the sixteenth century, but it suffers to some extent from the slight significance of its subject. To Rimbaud, no doubt, this idle librarian was a great enemy, and many months afterwards (years in a normal life) he complains of "l'horrible quantité de force et de science le sort a toujours éloignées de nous," but to us there is something wasteful in the application of this elaborate and highly decorative diction. But here it is simple, picturesque, and deadly enough:

Oh! ne les faites pas lever! C'est le naufrage . . .
 Ils surgissent, grondant comme des chats giflés . . .
 Et vous les écoutez cognant leur têtes chauves
 Aux murs sombres, plaquant et plaquant leurs pieds tors.
 Et leurs boutons d'habit sont des prunelles fauves
 Qui vous accrochent l'œil du fond des corridors.

The laureate of the *Concours académique* was by this time a despised lout. Once admired by those whose opinion he disdained, his pride commanded that he should be able to ignore their disgust. He disciplined himself to do without the approbation of those around him and to withstand their hostility. He pursued in isolation the mental exercises which culminated in his theory of the development of the poet into the seer.¹

¹ See page 202.

At this moment the reading of Helvétius turned out to be, after that of Rousseau, one of the determining influences in his life.

From his theory that the mind was the product of the sensations he set Rimbaud off on his wild chase after a new nature. Already sufficiently introspective, this theory came as a justification and gave his cultivation of his sensations a morbidity. The disdain of prejudice was another passion in Helvétius which emphasized an existing tendency in Rimbaud. The indifference of Paris to his humanitarian aims gave another blow to the foundations of his idealism and turned him to introspection.

It is not extravagant to see in Helvétius an additional, if not an original, impulse. His incessant disillusionment as to *real* motives was a source of awed delight to the young rebel, for when Delahaye asked him to lend him the works of the philosopher, he answered, "Mieux vaut que tu ne les lises pas."

On the 18th March the bourgeois Republican government was overthrown and fled to Versailles, leaving Paris to the rule of the Communists. War-weary troops fraternized with the revolting workers and Equality's brief reign began. Even in the midst of his introspective labour this news roused the interest of Rimbaud and perhaps even yet his enthusiasm. But he had twice been beaten by lack of money and this time he waited. His mother, of course, did not give him a penny, and as he had stubbornly refused to return to school, preferring to go and live in a cave in a disused quarry, she had pestered him to "get something to do." For a few days in April he was employed as correspondence-clerk to a local paper, the *Progrès des Ardennes*, but on the 17th it was suspended. Then, hearing that recruits for the National Guard received thirty sous a day, which would this time give him a foothold in the

city, he set off again by road and reached Paris in the short space of six days. This territory was still occupied by German troops, and one night, passing through the forest of Villers-Cotterets, he was nearly ridden down by a patrol of Uhlans. We do not know how he lived on the road, but as soon as he had passed the defences he offered to enlist at the first Communist's post he reached. They welcomed him with enthusiasm, perhaps because they saw in this earnest blue-eyed boy who said, "I have walked sixty leagues to join you" the image of the one-time freshness of their aspirations. They enlisted him in the "Franc-tireurs de la Révolution," and made a collection on his behalf with which he stood them drinks. He was posted to the Babylon barracks, but as discipline was slack and stores diminished he received neither arms, equipment, nor uniform. This circumstance was fortunate, because the Government troops dealt briefly and effectively with anyone in uniform when they re-entered the city.

We have a letter dated 15th May, which was written at Charleville. Delahaye says that Rimbaud reached Paris after six days of walking, so that the earliest date he could have reached the city would be the 21st, and probably he did not leave on the 15th itself. On the 22nd May, however, the Versailles troops were in possession of the outer defences at Auteuil, and two days later saw the climax of the "Semaine Sanglante," with the burning of the Hôtel de Ville and other destructive outrages by the Communists and the atrocities of the Government troops. The White Terror which followed the Red will be found described more or less fully in the text-books on the subject, but it is rarely known how ghastly it was. Verlaine describes what he saw from his balcony in the Rue Cardinal Lemoine, on Wednesday, 24th May 1871 — the deploying of the "Vengeurs de Flourens," lads of fifteen and sixteen

years, who were killed to the last man next day at the barricade on the Pont d'Austerlitz by infuriated sailors.

It was indeed fortunate that Rimbaud was not served out with a uniform. He fretted, however, at the dissolute life in barracks, for he had expected an activity as unflagging as his own amongst the liberators of the world. There was still at this time something in Rimbaud's composition of a mingling of the Marxian and sentimental revolutionaries. The belief in direct action was then at its strongest, there was distinctly a belief that very simply, after the Holy Revolution, an enlightened and infidel proletariat would hug the world like a polar bear, in an embrace in which altruism and self-interest would be confounded. Long after he had ceased to care for social reform, in his very last poems, this adolescent vision returns, showing him a world in which he might have lived, which, at least, he might have led.

In the Babylon barracks his boyish delicacy of sense and sentiment, exposed once again to the grossness of barrack-room communal existence, was excruciated, for these were the men from whom he had expected the most. The sincerity of *Le Cœur volé*, that poem of bitter clowning in which he complains of the theft of his innocence, cannot be questioned. For he had taken seriously the big words of those who inspired him, nobility, sacrifice, fraternity. When he found, or thought he found, for he never took the long view, that he had been fooled into using himself like that, his rage was complex and intense.

The pay, or if there was no pay at least the rations, of the Federal Army saved him from the destitution of his previous stay in Paris. But even on his arrival the Versailles troops must have been bombarding the city. Reinforced by prisoners of war from Germany, they soon began to shell the Champs Elysées and the Arc

towards the end of the month, footing it again through Château-Thierry, Soissons, Reims, and Rethel. His civilian clothes and his extreme youth roused no suspicion among the police warned to arrest fugitive Communists.

Such was the third and final shock which his belief in the betterment of society by concerted action from within did not survive. He brought back from this wild visit a poem in which he assaults with tremendous invective the triumph of the old order. *Paris se repeuple* is far more than an attack on the supporters of M. Thiers' republican-democratic Government. Faced with the definite denial of all the hopes he had centred in the establishment of a new society he scourges the carnal complacency in mankind which leads them to satisfy most easily their desires when, as the visionary says, with an effort and with forbearance, we might enter unimaginable cities.

O cœurs de saleté, bouches épouvantables.

In his fury he reviles the nature which is common to political parties of either wing, and nothing could better illustrate the course his life was taking than this refusal to tolerate the humanity of mankind, and how bare his ambition was of all the familiar human interests. It was only gradually after the disillusionment in which ended his successive crusades for the salvation of mankind or for his own salvation as a *social* being, by means of political, aesthetic, and moral gospels, that the pure egoism of his ideal was revealed. But at this moment he suffered from his disillusionment as to the efficacy of direct action, and he covered his despair in a tone of sarcastic congratulation:

Société, tout est rétabli : les orgies
Pleurent leur ancien rôle aux anciens lupanars . . .

VI

SPLEEN AND THE VISIONARY

Le jeune homme, devant les laideurs de ce monde,
Tressaille dans son cœur, largement irrité. . . .

THE war was over, the Commune dispersed, and the bourgeois re-established in his complacency. It will then be easy to account for the irritation which has to be constantly referred to to describe Rimbaud's state of mind during the summer of 1871. The tendency of education has been to create in the young mind the illusion that Nature is kind and Man benevolent, which is as it may be, but there comes a time when so much evidence has been accumulated to the contrary that the inexperienced youth bounds to the opposite conclusion. Rimbaud's experience had been exceptionally bitter. It has been shown with what confidence of generosity he threw himself three times on the hospitality of Paris, only to be rebuffed in the first place with insult and the second with injury, and in the last barely escaped with his life. Before he left to join the Commune he had sketched a project of a Communist Constitution which, from the details which alone have survived, seems to have had a sound basis of political wisdom. His gradual disentanglement from political endeavour must have been hastened when he found that his ideas left his fellow communists as far in the rear as he had left his conventional school friends when he became a revolutionary. Henceforward he is a solitary, and his references to fraternal aspirations are made with an air of

doubt, regret, or wonderment; always as from a distance, as a measure to be taken for others.

It is easy to account for his political disillusionment, but there is a mystery around his sentimental life, which had begun to break up before the Commune. In a number of his early poems, in *Roman* and *A la Musique*, he displays the usual adolescent interest in girls, though with a maturity and a detachment quite his own. But not even the accusations in *Soleil et Chair*, or the attack in *Vénus Anadyomène* prepare us for the personal hatred he suddenly expresses:

O mes petites amoureuses,
Que je vous hais! . . .

Berrichon relates a sentimental misadventure in which the girl, made nervous by Rimbaud's embarrassment in her presence, laughed in his face. The cause, if such was it, was out of all proportion to the effect, but with such a proud and sensitive nature it is possible that a nervous giggle released the savage misogyny of the poem from which we have quoted. Certainly from this moment, at the beginning of 1871, Rimbaud became convinced of the insufficiency of women to bear the share which is assigned to them in the emotion of love, and we shall see him treating the theme with gravity in *Les Sœurs de Charité*. He had desired affection and understanding, and received neither. Even his friendship with Izambard was ruptured when he sent him a letter containing his profession of faith—"profession de foi littératuricide," in which all the poets from Homer to Hugo are ranged together as one body which "absolutely disgusts" him; he had passed the point to which his schoolmaster could follow him. His mother did not give him a penny, and when, exhausted by long hours of mental concentration he desired a relaxation, the boredom of life in the little provincial town closed

remorselessly round him. He might go to a café and sit and listen silently to a radical journalist and a republican, anti-clerical tax-collector, figures of public note, till the banality of their conversation drove him to some outrageous paradox. Such men, good fellows though they may have been, drew out rather his revolting instincts, the anti-religious and the anti-social; in his aspirations he was alone, and it was for this reason that he still looked eagerly to Paris, expecting to find there, in spite of the deceptions he had suffered, a companion who would respond with an equal disinterestedness to the fervour of his ambition.

His altruism had been transmuted or shorn of some of the rhetorical wool which hid its core of egotism by his successive disappointments, and now he sought by the sheer intensification of his personality to lead men to their redemption. Through the discoveries made in his own torments he promised to bring them power, as Prometheus brought them fire—"le poète est vraiment Voleur de feu, il s'est chargé de l'homme, des animaux même." On 15th May, just before he left to witness the Communist tragedy, he outlined the method by which the poet, already the most richly gifted of men and endowed with the finest powers of expression might transform himself into a Voyant or Seer and excel them in *feeling*, in perception, as much as he had previously excelled them in expression. "Le Poète se faire voyant par un long immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens. Toutes les formes d'amour, de souffrance, de folie; il cherche lui même, il épuise en lui tous les poisons, pour n'en garder que les quintessences. Ineffable torture où il a besoin de toute la foi, de toute la force surhumaine, où il devient entre tous le grand malade, le grand criminel, le grand maudit,—et le suprême Savant!—Car il arrive à l'inconnu! Puisqu'il a cultivé son âme déjà riche plus qu'aucun! Il arrive à

l'inconnu, et quand affolé, il finirait par perdre l'intelligence de ses visions, il les a vues! Qu'il crève dans son bondissement par les choses inouïes et innomables: viendront d'autres horribles travailleurs; ils commenceront par les horizons ou l'autre s'est affaissé."

This was the fire fed with the self-deification of Hugo, a Romantic satanism and the new scientists' evolutionism which was burning behind those "beaux yeux d'azur noyés dans l'extase" while he strolled with hypnotized steps through the streets of his little town, or remained sunk in profound contemplation among the chatter of his mother and sisters. There is no need to relate to any mystical or pathological condition this strange detachment from his surroundings, he was simply out of place as Shelley would have been on the Stock Exchange. The reality of his defiance, somewhat obscured by rhetoric in the passage quoted, appears in the sincerity of a phrase, "Imaginez un homme s'implantant et se cultivant des verrues sur le visage." Thus was the Poet of the Romantics translated! But beneath all the extravagance of expression there are flashes of intuitive reason.

In the early months of the year he continued actively to excite disapproval by his appearance and his manners. He allowed his hair to grow till it flowed in glossy chestnut waves down his back, and smoked an offensive-looking pipe with, to emphasize his bad taste, the bowl upside down. One day a clerk, lounging with a group of others at a street corner during the luncheon hour, called him and said, "Here youngster, here is twopence to go and get your hair cut." It was not in Rimbaud's programme to be ruffled by such things, and Delahaye met him directly afterwards highly pleased with the stroke of luck which enabled him, in those days, to buy a considerable quantity of tobacco. He accosted the priests he met on his walks with impolite gestures,

and though they generally ignored him, if one asked him what he meant he would turn away with a sneer. At the same time he used to scrawl "MORT À DIEU" on the public seats or on the walls where the people coming from church might see it, and what most amused him was the fact that no one had the initiative or a strong enough conviction to rub it out.

Such a demonstration of revolt may appear crude to-day, the public is so enlightened; but fifty years ago subtler methods would have been lost on it,

On ne peut écraser que le mufle qu'on a.

He continued to extend his scepticism with all manner of reading, and under the strain of these acquisitions the scaffolding of his official education began to collapse. It was probably Renan and Darwin, or their forgotten popularizers, the evolutionary biologists so prominent at the time, who put in his hands the pick and crowbar with which to rifle the tawdry virtues of the contemporary mind. But his scepticism was innate. There is something in him which makes him so much tenser and sharper than anyone else, and was the cause of his failure in society. He complains of it himself as of a disease. "C'est bien ce que j'ai toujours eu, plus de foi en histoire, l'oubli des principes." This trust, which he lacked, in generalizations is the basis of society and civilization, and also, if carried far enough, mental death.

In August Rimbaud was so oppressed by his surroundings that his antagonism lost the vigorous invective of his early letters. Charleville is surely the least attractive town between Paris and the frontier, though its Siamese neighbour Mézières, with its steep paved streets, obsolete fortifications, and deep moat is not without distinction. But only the presence of the

Meuse saves Charleville itself from utter desolation, and even then it is the dustiest town in Western Europe. To-day (though something must be forgiven on account of its unlucky record in the last two wars) his name is unfamiliar in the few poor bookshops, even though there is a bustless monument to his memory in the Station Square. The bronze head presented to the town by Parisian men of letters on their own initiative, was removed by the Germans during their occupation, but walking from the station through the pleasant little garden with bandstand and fishponds, the same which he described in *A La Musique*, the stone still confronts one with the sole justification "Explorations en Afrique." Only on closer examination may one detect the other leaves in his wreath of glory: "Illuminations, Bateau Ivre, Voyelles, Saison en Enfer." But it seems these shopkeepers lack even the commercial enterprise necessary to draw profit from their involuntary connection with a poet. There is a public library, open during the holidays for two hours a week, but perhaps the town does not possess a second Rimbaud to fret at this meagre ration of knowledge. Bound in its parched and stony streets, its squalid, lack-lustre cafés, deprived even of the relief of pocket money, even of the price of a postage-stamp with which to frank the poems he sent to a friend, with a mother so vigilant that he has his letters addressed elsewhere, he searches desperately for any means that may enable him to live in Paris. Even the correspondent to whom he wrote the letter from which we just quoted, as well as his local friends, deterred him on account of his youth. The former had told him casually that manual labour might be in demand at fifteen sous a day, but finally advises him to wait. To reply to this letter Rimbaud summoned all his self-control: "Vous me faites recommencer ma prière: soit. Voici la plainte complète. Je cherche des

paroles calmes: mais ma science de l'art n'est pas bien profonde. . . ." He sums up the unhappy position to which his secret ambition has brought him: "J'ai quitté plus d'un an la vie ordinaire pour ce que vous savez. Enfermé sans cesse dans cette inqualifiable contrée ardennaise, ne fréquentant pas un homme, recueilli dans un travail infame, *inepte, obstiné, mystérieux, ne répondant que par le silence aux questions, aux apostrophes grossières et méchantes. . . .*" How well that characterizes his attitude, who all his life refrained from the mutual pandering of confidences. The fury with which he heard, when in Africa, of the publication of some of his early work was shame at the thought of those poems in which he had put his naked feelings, passing through the hands of people he despised.

By his self-restraint, he says, he would show himself worthy of his extra-legal position, but his mother was equally firm—a situation in Charleville by such and such a day, or the door, he accuses her of saying. He refused that sort of life "sans donner mes raisons; c'eût été pitoyable." He asks nothing, nothing but a piece of information. He wishes to work voluntarily, in Paris, which he loves, but he adds: "Je vous ai prié d'indiquer des occupations peu absorbantes parce que *la pensée réclame de larges tranchées de temps.*"

Nothing which we might say could so well indicate the seriousness and the religious fervour with which he pursued his mental revolt than the spontaneous confession which we have italicized.

In the meantime another means of departure was discussed. It was suggested that an entry might be made into the literary world through the introduction of an established poet, and for a time Rimbaud considered the possibility of writing to Théodore de Banville or Léon Dierx. It was decided otherwise because his friend Bretagne had previously been employed in

connection with a sugar refinery at Fampoux, near Arras, owned by Verlaine's cousin, and had become well acquainted with the poet during his frequent visits there. We have seen that, a year ago, Rimbaud was attracted by his poetry, which showed a freedom from prejudice and delicate *insouciance* which was so different from the prosaism of his contemporaries. *Les Vaincus*, a poem published a little later, showed Verlaine still more sympathetically as a friend of the Commune. It was Bretagne then who provided the introduction which had such tremendous consequences on the lives of both poets, and enabled Rimbaud to write to Verlaine, who relates: "On my return to Paris at the end of the summer holidays, 1871, I found a letter, signed Arthur Rimbaud, which contained *Les Effarés* and *Les Premières Communions*." Rimbaud had not misjudged his man, for those poems woke a response in the older poet (not yet the pious Christian who found the spirit of the second poem so detestable) which he acknowledged by saying, "J'ai comme un relent de votre lycanthropie." In reply to another letter containing more poems, in which the urgent question of going to live in Paris was put before him, Verlaine replied with more praises and the advice to come—"Vous êtes prodigieusement armé en guerre" he unwisely concluded. Then, after Rimbaud had insistently reminded him of his youth, his inexperience, and lack of social polish (*petite crasse*, he described himself), and his complete lack of material resources, Verlaine consulted a number of his literary friends, Charles Cros, Valade, and Mérat among them. Assured of their assistance he offered Rimbaud the hospitality of his home (he was living with his father-in-law) and exhorted him to come "Venez, chère grande âme, on vous appelle, on vous attend."

It was the end of September before these arrange-

ments had been completed, and whilst he was waiting in anticipation of his freedom, Rimbaud gathered himself together for an effort which should surpass everything that he had yet written. In *Bateau Ivre* he expresses the intoxication of the last months, of his mad voyage over the ocean—need it be said—of imaginative experience, for he had never seen a wider stretch of water than the flooded meadows of the Meuse.

On a warm and sunny afternoon of early autumn Rimbaud told his friend Delahaye that he would like to take a last walk in the country round Charleville. "It was just such a day as induces hope," Delahaye relates, to whom we are indebted for almost all the personal reminiscences we have given, "and everything added to the delight of this hard-won freedom. We sat down at the edge of a wood and Rimbaud said, 'This is what I have done to show *them* when I arrive.' And he read me *Bateau Ivre*."

"Rimbaud, who had hardly been to the theatre at all nor received any teaching in elocution, read his lines without emphasis and with no vocal flourishes, rather convulsively, like a child telling of some great grief and in a kind of hurry; hungry, hastening to re-live it all. His sensitive voice, still childish, rendered naturally the vibration and the power of the words. He spoke as he felt, as it had come, as if in a precipitous flow of violent sensations."

He had asserted his mental independence more than a year before, but except in his brief periods of gipsy wandering he had never been free. Now that his entry into the real world was at hand, free of the restraints of his home life, he looked back over the great distances travelled since he had first slipped the cables of priest and tutor. Those are the seascapes of *Bateau Ivre*, and in the opening movement he recaptures the sigh of relief

with which he had then glided out of the placid reaches of ordinary life.

Comme je descendais des Fleuves impassibles,
Je ne me sentis plus guidé par les haleurs. . . .

Les fleuves m'ont laissé descendre où je voulais.

It was, strangely, a declaration of failure that he took to show them in Paris, a premonition of the failure of his superhuman effort, in face of the merchants and the pride of force and riches. It is a confession, too, that though he will struggle now without love, as a pure egoist, he is haunted by the eyes of the Communists he has deserted, imprisoned in the hulks.

Je ne puis plus, baigné de vos langueurs, ô lames,
Enlever leur sillage aux porteurs de cotons,
Ni traverser l'orgueil des drapeaux et des flammes,
Ni nager sous les yeux horribles des pontons !

"After the fleeting emotion this reading had caused him," continues Delahaye, "he remained sad and downcast. "Ah, yes," he replied to his friend's enthusiastic praise, "no one has written anything like it, I know that well. . . . And yet. . . . This world of writers and artists. . . . Salons, fashion. . . . I do not know how to behave, I am clumsy, nervous, I do not know how to talk. . . . Oh, as for Thought, I am not afraid of anyone . . . but . . . what am I going to do down there?"

What, indeed, was he to do after *Bateau Ivre*? It was his fate to exhaust the art he touched, like a sailor who whittles his block of wood till it is a disembodied image. To produce a second poem like it would be to deny its sincerity, just as a repetition of *Le Voyage* would have been a factitious pastiche. But whilst Baudelaire wrote his valediction near the end of his

life, Rimbaud was not yet seventeen. It is here that the problem of his renunciation first appears acutely. He had well smashed his pen when he wrote *Bateau Ivre*, and henceforward his poems became more and more delicate till they are only an air, or suggestion of unhuman ecstasy. When he denied his full strength of love the possibility of sympathy went with it, and he had engaged himself in a path which grew ever narrower and narrower. This was a blow at the base of art and the first version of his vow of silence. Mr. Symons has well remarked that the things Rimbaud had to say were "each an action with consequences."

The consequences of *Bateau Ivre* will presently be apparent.

VII

THE WORLD OF LETTERS

THE following morning Delahaye met him at the station, and he was in excellent spirits. He was glad to be going to Paris again with, this time, the certainty of a hospitable welcome. He had not told his mother that he was going away, and took nothing with him but his poems. The money for his ticket was provided by a friend. Beyond his fare he had not a franc, and it was thus, without a change of clothes or merest necessities of the toilet, that he arrived at the Verlaines' who, though not wealthy, were well above the grade of the middle-class which is pleased to be called respectable. Verlaine and his young wife, a girl of seventeen, who had at this time been married about a year, were living with her parents to save the expense of two households. The poet had not dared to return to his desk in the Municipal Service, fearing that he would be proceeded against for his part in the Commune, though that was innocent enough. They were living on his own small income, and his idleness and his habit of heavy drinking, which he had resumed, did not meet with the approval of his father-in-law. M. Mauté was a self-important and overbearing man of business, and he and Verlaine had already had arguments which ended in the destruction of crockery. If we remember that Verlaine's wife was within a month or two of bearing her first child it will be seen that the domestic position was already delicate when a clumsy, penniless boy from the country arrived for an indefinite visit.

Verlaine set out to meet him at the station with

Charles Cros, a poet of talent and inventor of singular misfortune. Among the discoveries claimed for him are a talking machine before Edison, photography in colour, and the conception of communicating with Mars by means of huge mirrors placed in the Siberian desert. He was one of the most prominent men in the fantastic salon of Nina de Callias, and for long her accepted lover, but his ambitions were too diverse to come to fruition. Astanza of his own sums up well enough his significance:

Avec les Fleurs, avec les Femmes,
Avec l'Absinthe, avec le Feu,
On peut se divertir un peu,
Jouer son rôle en quelque drame.

These two, lingering too long in a café, or by some misunderstanding, failed to meet their visitor whom they found before them when they returned, quietly conversing with Madame Mauté and Verlaine's wife. They had been prepared to receive a young man, even a very young man, but they had not expected the gawky boy who now confronted them. Their momentary embarrassment was no doubt appreciated by Rimbaud who was not one to accept criticism with gratitude. The contrast between the maturity of his poems and the plump, rosy, child's face on the bony body of a growing boy was so sharp as to justify their surprise. His hands were large and rough, his clothes, though strong and good, were not elegant, and his speech was flavoured with the twang of the Ardennes. The good Parisians might have overlooked these things had he had a sociable manner, but his self-consciousness was so acute that he could not talk readily. He was incapable, too, of that, we will not say insincerity, but momentary surrender of one's egoism which alone renders social intercourse possible and pleasant. Among any people he would have been remarkable, but among the politest

of the Western nations he appeared as a horror, almost as inhuman. So sensitive a critic as Remy de Gourmont, praising justly certain of his poems, has yet no sympathetic understanding of Rimbaud's egotistic integrity. He cannot believe in the reality of his anti-social invectives, and denies him sincerity to grant him only the executive power of a belly-dancer. That was a clean miss of Rimbaud's deepest quality.

If he could meet with no better treatment from a critic of such a rank it may be easily imagined that sooner or later among the mediocre and banal his position would become intolerable. He could not compromise; as he said himself, he was a brute, an animal incapable of the least dissimulation. Difficult as it is to appreciate this innocence, it is a brute innocence, in face of the record of his stay in Paris, on closer thought it appears the only adequate explanation of his failure. Had he been in the least calculating, an *arriviste*, he might easily have curbed his expressions and flattered his inferiors and been crowned by the young men Prince of Poets. But it does not seem to have occurred to him to hide his belief in his own superiority, as a Poet and Seer, and to treat those he met as other than the mere versifiers most of them were.

He did acknowledge, however, to himself and with anger, that he cut a comic figure at a polite dinner-table. His absurd exterior did not do justice to the strength and clarity of his spirit, and knowing that he appeared awkward and stupid he overstressed the originality of his character, so that his noblest ambitions seemed aggressive and abominable.

For the first evening at all events he contented himself with a silent reservation. How, indeed, could he reply but wearily to the ladies' questions as to his journey and his life at Charleville? He had three times travelled the road on foot, and his life had been a

peculiar sort of hell? There are fixed responses to the questions of a hostess when one arrives after a long journey, but Rimbaud did not know them. Certain critics, who were not present, have implied that his conduct was extremely ill-mannered at this first dinner, but Verlaine's account does not include any inexplicable behaviour.

He was hungry, he had probably fasted from the morning, so naturally he ate readily. He was socially untrained, and, though arrogant where he knew himself safe, was diffident and timid when his pride might be threatened. Cros, too, by questioning him as to the origin of the inspiration of certain of his poems, committed what is in effect the worst possible piece of bad taste towards a poet. He was so absorbed in his own thoughts that he could neither reply to nor appreciate the delicious chatter of women. It shows a complete lack of understanding to blame him for his silence as though it were due, already, to disdain. It was an inability for which, from one point of view, he is to be pitied. I imagine him pathetically searching his mind for some remark which should show his appreciation, his readiness to learn. But when he did find one, after watching the dogs gambolling round the table, and said, "Les chiens, se sont des libéraux," he betrayed his confinement in his own preoccupations. For it was an unfortunate remark at a time when everyone was trying to forget about the Commune.

Then, when he found that no communication was possible, he defended his own isolation by disdain.

The first days of his visit were delicious. At last he had found a sympathetic and truly appreciative audience, for Verlaine was quick to follow the advance of his destructive logic, and responded to his poetic vision. Long before he met him, it will be remembered, he had selected Verlaine as one of the two *voyants* among

the younger poets; he was the only one he emphatically praised. During long walks Rimbaud expounded the principles of his ambition and spoke of his verses, even of *Bateau Ivre*, with disdain; he was pondering the invention of a new technique, and filled with the impulse of his future work. Their sojourns in the cafés along the "Boule' Mich'e" were less happy. Rimbaud became irritable if long seated, and for the first time he tasted alcohol in an intenser form than beer or *vin bleu*. Verlaine, too, though normally docile, was irritable when in liquor, and it was in these places that they met the larger body of poets and writers to whom literature is a profession independent of inspiration. Rimbaud's outrageous assertions, whether they were intended seriously or not, and in most cases no doubt they were, stamped him in their eyes a destructive anarchist. The Commune was a fresh wound in the memory, and yet he dared to regret that the Louvre and the Bibliothèque were not burnt down. Useless for him to argue that, faced with the annihilation of their proudest monuments, men would be goaded into a new and salutary effort. It was a period of reaction, averse to disinterested speculation. A man on a raft in mid-ocean does not willingly abandon a tin of bully-beef even if he cannot open it. "Ane lugubre" was Gill's appropriate phrase.

Rimbaud's freedom of manners did not endear him to Verlaine's wife and mother-in-law. He demanded the removal of a picture which displeased him. He stretched himself on the pavement outside the house to satisfy his continual need of sun and warmth. His was, besides, another mouth to feed, and the elder poet's lack of employment rendered that a matter of some seriousness. The return of M. Mauté hastened the departure of the unwelcome guest, who went out to reconquer his independence in destitution and the wintry streets which he had experienced earlier in the year.

Presently it was a remorseful Verlaine, angry at his

desertion of his young friend in face of the domestic opposition, who scoured the most likely streets and cafés for a trace of the wanderer. At last he found him, muddy and tattered, cold, hungry, and verminous. His features had lost their childish rotundity to take on the narrow curves which marked his youthful beauty.

He was about to return to Charleville by the road he knew so well, but the spontaneous solicitude of Verlaine enabled him, with no injury to his pride, to put off his descent into that hated region. Verlaine took him to confer with Cros and Gill, and together they decided that it would be wisest to ask the advice of Théodore de Banville, the reigning Prince of Poets. Banville himself related the events of that afternoon to Mallarmé, who has recorded them in his inimitable phrasing. Cros and Gill, it seems, approached him on Rimbaud's behalf. The veteran poet, whom thirty years before Baudelaire had saluted in his youthful rape of glory, "Comme un jeune ruffian terrassant sa maîtresse," had the generosity of his strength. The young men asked him to assist "one of us" in the creation of great poetry. Banville decided that for this purpose, the ability being understood, a lodging was necessary, and accordingly proffered one of the attics of his own house. This was furnished with a bed, a chair and table, paper, pens and ink, and Rimbaud was there installed. "But to the astonishment of his host, at the time when the dinners were in preparation, shouts were heard from each story and immediately he observed, framed in the attic window, someone shaking violently and throwing over the roof, perhaps so that they might disappear with the last rays of the sun, shreds of clothing. And as he enquired, in the presence of the god, the reason for this mythological nudity, Arthur Rimbaud replied to the author of *Les Exilés*, who could but admit the justice of the observation and blame his own lack of foresight: 'It is because I could not live in such a clean virginal

room with my old clothes all rotten with lice.'” The generous elder added a change of clothes and an invitation to dinner to his previous hospitality, for, he said, clothes and lodgings are not enough, if one wants to produce remarkable poems, unless one eats as well.

But the humiliation of Rimbaud was not assuaged by the urbanity of an elderly gentleman. He deepened the sense of his filthiness, impressed the consciousness of his degradation further in his mind, and yet, by the first miracle effected by his unprejudiced transvaluation of values, drew from a horrible subject one of the loveliest of his poems. It may be that the two aristocratic women in *Les Chercheuses de Poux*, whose delicate fingers in their ignoble pursuit eased the child's torments, were really Madame Banville and Madame Hugo. It is not unlikely that such a masterpiece of observation had an original in real life, but Rimbaud, if he rarely invents, unceasingly transposes his details. Overshadowed by the exuberance of *Bateau Ivre* this poem displays a poetic strength which, in its mastery of the range of hitherto incommunicable sensations, surpasses all that has been done before or since. For this reason I am particularly grateful for the privilege of reprinting Mr. Sturge Moore's translation.

Rimbaud the entranced child appears in this poem more clearly than prose by any effort can make him. Consider the expressiveness of *parmi ses grises indolences*, the cruel exactness of

Salives

Reprises sur la lèvre ou désirs de baisers.

and, after the resources of rarity and analysis have been exploited to their uttermost, the colloquial simplicity of the last line

Soudre et mourir sans cesse un désir de pleurer

which restores to us the dumb, sensation-burdened child.

After his period of neglect Verlaine cultivated Rimbaud still more assiduously. At home he did not hesitate to praise with enthusiasm the wonderful nature of their late guest; his delicacy and spasmodic violence, his extraordinary moral courage, his lucid perfection of phrase. The women's dissatisfaction with his long absences and unsteady habits gradually crystallized round this intrusive provincial whose appearance had not heralded any distinction which they could appreciate. The quarrels became more frequent and more humiliating, and Verlaine sought refuge more frequently in Rimbaud's company and in the arms of his old enemy, absinthe. He introduced Rimbaud wherever he went, and it was in this way that he met, among most of the foremost poets of the time, Hugo, who bestowed on him his pontifical and not unironic blessing, "C'est Shakespeare enfant." But Rimbaud, with that gesture which is at once magnificent and perverse, the type of the impulse of his youth, disdained the praise even of great men. The remark of Hugo's brought him some fame and some jealousy, and resulted in a request for a sitting from Etienne Carjat, the photographer of the Second Empire, who made portraits of most of the celebrated artists of the day. Very soon afterwards an incident occurred which definitely affected Rimbaud's popularity. A number of literary men and artists, frequenters of the salons of Nina Callias and Madame de Ricard, used to meet for a monthly dinner and became, for the time of these reunions, the *Vilains Bonshommes*. It was the custom for certain members to declaim at dessert their recent verses, and Rimbaud, whose aesthetic was by this time so immensely distant from that of the contemporary poets, protested childishly against the length of one recitation. The burly Carjat, the friend and colleague of the poet thus insulted, ordered Rimbaud to be quiet, but the latter, influenced by the liquor he

had drunk, persisted in interrupting the reciter. He went on humming a dirty word, and nothing would stop him till Carjat threatened to box his ears. Then Rimbaud seized the sword-stick which Verlaine unwisely made a habit of carrying, unsheathed it, and struck across the table at his corrector who, as it happened, was only grazed on the wrist. Verlaine, recording the conclusion of this silly rumpus, which has already given rise to too many insinuations, says that he seized the blade from the furious boy, broke it across his knee, and as he himself had to return home early, confided him, now half-sobered, to a young painter who saw him to his lodgings in the Rue Campagne-Première.

For he had already tired of the hospitality of Banville's attic, which he left apparently without ill-feeling, though someone has said that he used to wipe his boots on the window-curtains. At least, Madame Banville had his bed moved to his next lodging—the sitting-room laboratory of Charles Cros. Here he alienated the amiable and interesting Cros, at this time studying colour-photography, by a singularly stupid piece of hooliganism, typical of his inability or refusal to understand the conditions under which social life is possible. He tore out all Cros's poems as they appeared in a certain periodical, so that when the poet wanted to prepare his volume *Le Coffret de Santal*, much of the material was missing. By the end of the year, however, Rimbaud had a room of his own in the street mentioned and it was in part maintained by the tax Verlaine levied on the friends who had joined with him in inviting Rimbaud to Paris. He thus obtained an income of three francs a day, which was then sufficient for a bare livelihood.

After Rimbaud had been removed from the dinner of the *Vilains Bonshommes* it was decided that he should not be invited in the future. Verlaine, they said, would always be welcome, but his arrogant and quarrel-

some young friend could not be tolerated. Verlaine considered this an insult, and from that moment began the gradual separation from all but his intimate friends in the literary circles which became complete with his imprisonment, and was not repaired till the early '80's.

By this time Rimbaud was thoroughly out of favour with the more established men of letters, a class with whom, in mentality and poetics, he had not the slightest thing in common. At first, no doubt, it had been amusing to excite this curious arrival from the country. He acted up to the part that was expected of him by writing a sonnet on the colours of the vowels, but soon the seriousness of his antagonism to the received virtues began to tell against him. To the older Parnassians, engaged in arranging oriental bric-à-brac on parallel shelves, his intensely personal art meant nothing. Mendès, Coppée, and Hérédia admired him hardly at all. Valade and Mérat, sympathetic at first, were offended by his subsequent behaviour. The two last-named protested against his inclusion in the famous *Coin de Table* then being painted by Fantin-Latour and at present in the Louvre. Fame has been crueller even than Rimbaud, for she guards an ironic silence on the achievements of the eminent *littérateurs* there represented. Rimbaud and Verlaine alone have a living reputation. The painter found Rimbaud completely speechless during his sitting, and the sulky cherub he has portrayed is in a sense true to life, though he would have painted truer had he not softened the original instinct which led him to see therein impatience and disdain. For Rimbaud was disdainful, not only of the men he met, but of himself for being so unsuccessful in face of the mere refinement of inferior minds and dependent on men whom he considered with little or no regard. His expression half revealed his growing exasperation against everyone and everything.

He refused, after his first presentation of his poems, to purchase indulgences with his genius, and for that reason he exposed himself to still further criticism; it is not surprising that the others thought him insufferably conceited or trading on the success of a happy accident. It was in the early days of his stay that Mallarmé saw him, probably at that very dinner which had such an unfortunate conclusion. "He looked like a laundress," he thought, "because of his great hands, red and chapped from the changes from warm to cold. Which would have indicated more terrible crafts appropriate to a youth. I learnt that they had signed some fine verses; his lips, with their sulky and sarcastic line, recited none."

It is too easy to blame the Parisians for arguing from normal experience. He asserted his independence of morality, therefore he must be depraved. He despised the caresses of women, therefore he must be perverted. The inspiration of his idleness by far surpassed the products of their industry, therefore his genius must be morbid. Such are the least of the insinuations which abound in the early literature of the subject. We who have witnessed his heroic disregard, from the time that he was fifteen, of his material comfort or safety in face of the ambition which, under successive disguises, he unceasingly pursued, cannot in common justice dismiss his conduct as ignoble. But we can also understand that to an outsider he must have appeared at this time an unqualified young ruffian, and that the exuberance of his familiar vocabulary, for he was an expert in scatological abuse, might, if he perversely willed, alienate a listener of potential sympathies.

Jean Richepin wrote some years ago that he and a few friends of a generation younger than the Parnassians, Forain, Ponchon, Nouveau among others, regarded him as the boy of genius he was, and that they were alone

then in thinking so. The legend of his recklessness, no doubt, underwent great exaggeration as it passed from mouth to mouth. When there was still but little written information as to his life Mr. George Moore culled from those same circles the anecdotes which he embodied in his charming essay which introduced us to two new poets. But the picturesque romanticism of the story he tells does not correspond with the facts as they are better known. The misunderstanding was general. "We learnt with surprise," said M. Anatole France, "that a new Villon had come among us."

VIII

HALLUCINATION: FAILURE: ESCAPE

THE manner in which Verlaine introduced his guest to his literary friends, as one who was going to outdo them all, was not the most tactful he could have chosen. For himself, he was without jealousy, and all his life maintained the genius of Rimbaud as something sacred and supernatural. Less intimate friends, without the benefit of the experience of that vigorous spirit which Rimbaud had, but which his nature prevented him from disclosing except to a few in real sympathy with him, saw in Verlaine's infatuation only a physical aberration. There was, none the less, an intellectual attraction, which is understood if we can see Verlaine as the child he morally was, irked to desperation by the discipline of the nursery, by his father-in-law's disapproval, his domestic tyranny, the lack of employment, and anxiety as to the future. A man of so fine and delicate a temperament, the very type of instability, cannot cope with evil circumstances; he is capable of a brief, not of a prolonged, effort of that kind. To such a nature evasion always presents itself as the most attractive course, and the arrival of Rimbaud corresponded to the culmination of such a desire. We have seen to what a pitch of scepticism Rimbaud's mental exertions had already risen. When the first shock caused by his boyish appearance had subsided, Verlaine relished with avidity the extraordinary fascination of the young poet. "Il est l'intellectualité suprême, toutes les puissances, toutes les séductions à une degré inouï. La langue qu'il parle, je dis son langage familier,

—c'est la prose de diamant des *Illuminations* et d'*Une Saison en Enfer*, mais sortie de l'hallucination décrite. . . . Il n'a pas une infirmité d'intelligence, pas un illogisme, pas un préjugé. L'extraordinaire macération morale qu'il voulut subir l'affranchit de toute faiblesse, le libère de toute manie. On ne trouverait pas dans son cœur une grossièreté ni une tare."¹

To Verlaine, living as he was among people of inferior sensitiveness, whom he met only too willingly on the common ground that drinking made them, this pure and lucid mind in which he found admiration and sympathy, appeared like an angel from heaven armed with a sword which would cut all the ties of wearisome obligations. He need not for this reason have been insensible to the physical beauty of one who had at this time an indefinable, but unmistakable, charm, the beauty of personality rather than of flesh and bone. A photograph dated 1872 shows a great difference from the sulky guttersnipe of the year before. The marks of repression have gone, and if the mouth is repressed it is in determination. The nose is tilted mockingly and the eyes, of a large and luminous blue, are sleepy in their pride. He knew that he was a master.

All the controversy as to the good and evil of Rimbaud's character springs from the use of a system of measurement to which he will not be reduced. Only Verlaine was, at that time, able to discern beneath the pride and anger the others saw, the nobility of the mission he had set himself to accomplish before he would absent himself for ever in an illustrious retirement. The confusion of the ancient notions of good and evil in a single vital impulse, was, like the Bolshevik inflation of the currency, the first step necessary to the realization of his ideal. In *Crimen Amoris* Verlaine has given in terms characteristic of the author of *Sagesse* an

¹ E. Delahaye, *Verlaine*, 1919.

interpretation of the moral crusade which inspires the early *Illuminations*, which we imagine to have followed his gradual dissociation from social ideals and to have occupied him for the first months of his stay in Paris.

Or, le plus beau d'entre tous ces mauvais anges
 Avait seize ans sous sa couronne de fleurs. . . .
 Qu'est-ce qu'il dit de sa voix profonde et tendre
 Qui se marie au claquement clair du feu
 Et que la lune est extatique d'entendre!
 "Oh! je serai celui-là qui sera Dieu!"

The whole of this beautiful poem, though probably written under the influence of *Une Saison en Enfer*, condenses Verlaine's vision of Rimbaud, as he appeared to him at this time, in the midst of the chagrin and disappointment of his ordinary life. Some aroma of the intoxication of Rimbaud's conversation lingers in those verses: in the tone of the line

Oh je serai celui-là qui sera Dieu,

his very voice seems to ring. But his message was one which Verlaine was too weak to follow alone, one of freedom from human obligations, from love, duty, affection, citizenship, parenthood, and all the daily facts which irked them both. It was a message which demanded, too, the renunciation of human joys, as Rimbaud knew, and of which he paid the price. But Verlaine, poor Verlaine, was all his life trying to get his money back, not ignobly in spite of the indignities of his last years, but as one who realizes that this freedom is too austere for him. In some of the phrases of *Génie* Rimbaud has fixed for his part the vision of Messiahship with whose specious promises he had seduced Verlaine.

Arrière ses superstitions et ces anciens corps, ces ménages et ces âges, c'est cette époque-ci qui a sombré.

How Verlaine admired the eagle or angelic soaring of this youngster's mind which swept off his own lamb-like aspirations to an unpremeditated heaven! It is impossible to estimate the proportions of their mutual influence, for at this moment the genius of the one was complementary to that of the other. They have part of their creation in common. Rimbaud, as the swifter and more astonishing of the two may claim the suffrage of the picturesque, but there was a brooding fecundity in Verlaine. Rimbaud's passage was that of the fertilizing male. Verlaine, though unreasonable and grossly sensual, was filled with secret creative desires which were called out by the mysterious delicacies of the younger poet. Rimbaud dogged his reason to the borders of nightmare and subdued his needs to the exclusion even of imagination.

Rimbaud's influence was certainly a psychological one. He broke down inhibitions of emotions and style and enabled Verlaine to express himself. This forcible freeing of our true selves was, as M. Rivière has well pointed out, the meaning of Rimbaud's reiterated "love" and "charity." "The help he brings us is to make our existence here unbearable."¹

*Je tombais dans des sommeils de plusieurs jours, et, levé, je
continuais les rêves les plus tristes.*

One of the principal causes of Rimbaud's failure to cope adequately with the problem of sociability was his absorption in the system of intense introspection which he had outlined in his theory of the *Voyant*. We have remarked already that Verlaine found him basking on the pavement, and his habit of sleeping or drowsing on

¹ Compare the complaint of the Foolish Virgin: "Il m'attaque, il passe des heures à me faire honte de tout ce qui m'a pu toucher au monde, et s'indigne si je pleure."

the seats of the cafés originated in the same desire for concentration. When he was roused he would sit up rubbing his eyes with the backs of his hands. He had now the opportunity of experimenting with many forms of poison, and he moved among these men of letters like a drunkard or a visionary. He intoxicated himself, systematically, with alcohol, hashish, and tobacco. He relished the impressions of insomnia, and lived like a somnambulist, at the mercy of his visions. The strange condition of his existence, though it does not mitigate the offensiveness of his behaviour, renders it at least explicable. There is an account of a dinner to which Lepelletier, to please Verlaine, had invited him, which reads much more naturally if we imagine Rimbaud to have been half sunken in a trance.

He did not open his mouth during the first part of the meal, except to ask for bread or wine, as if he was in a restaurant; then, towards the end, under the influence of a heavy burgundy to which Verlaine freely helped him, he became aggressive. "He uttered provocative paradoxes and apothegms intended" (so Lepelletier interprets it) "to call forth contradiction. He particularly made fun of me by calling me 'salueur de morts,' as he had seen me raise my hat to a passing funeral procession. As I had lost my mother two months before I imposed silence on him on this subject" (the fact that such an immediate example of superstition and conventionality might have irritated Rimbaud, or that he had his own legitimate sensibility which might be wounded by current notions occurred neither to Lepelletier nor to anyone but Verlaine, it seems) "and looked at him in a certain way which he took in bad part, for he rose and advanced, threateningly, towards me. He had taken nervously and stupidly a knife from the table, as a weapon no doubt."

Lepelletier forced him to sit down and began a

grandiloquent harangue intended to impress his guest. "I told him that I had just come from the war, and that as I had not been afraid of the Prussians it was not a little blackguard like him who would frighten me. I added, not really in anger but rather jokingly, that if he had not had enough, and if he persisted in worrying us, I would show him to the door with a number of good kicks on his backside." For the rest of the evening Rimbaud remained silent, drinking heavily and covering himself in a cloud of smoke whilst Verlaine recited some poems. This anecdote tells us more of Lepelletier than of Rimbaud. It is obvious that this crass republican journalist, a brave man probably and a generous one, at least a good friend to Verlaine, was the last person in the world to observe accurately the reactions of a poet like Rimbaud. He asserts his disinterestedness and that need not be questioned, but the conclusion of his reminiscences are too comic not to be quoted: "Je n'ai depuis revu Rimbaud qu'une ou deux fois, mais je sais qu'il ne me portait pas dans son cœur. Il affectait, *ironiquement*, en parlant de moi, de me designer sous les épithètes de 'salueur de morts,' d' 'ancien troubade,' de 'pisseur de copie.' C'était bien inoffensif."

Those epithets, in their accuracy more than anything else, make us understand why Rimbaud was not popular. But the young are generally intolerant; he was inexperienced too, abnormally excited, and should have been cherished for the poems that were quick in him. He was given no respite, and the partial malformation of his work derives from that fact—for Verlaine was a sorry midwife.

When his pension of three francs a day was not available, or inadequate, he earned some money by hawking key-rings in the Rue de Rivoli, or by working as a waiter in a Montmartre café. But he was at present free from that obsession with the means of livelihood

which afterwards overtook him, he gave to his thoughts the large tracts of time they demanded. He cannot have had enough money to gain a wide experience of drugs, and it is easy to exaggerate his submission to their influence. The hallucinations on which certain of his poems are admittedly based, to which he frequently refers, were noticeable whilst he still lived in Charleville (cf. *Les Déserts de l'Amour*), and if their origin was pathological it is most likely that it was induced in the first place by the rigours of his early escapes from home. Not the least powerful of intoxicants, one which may have borne the weirdest fruits of hallucination and which is, at the same time, so innocent that the puritan might regard it with approbation, was the empty stomach in which he so frequently indulged. In this state a little alcohol would have a tempestuous effect, or fatigue alone would be sufficient to disintegrate the normal system of perception. From some or all of these causes the products of his senses and of his memory, light and sound, colours, forms, and sensations swept in a vertiginous procession through his brain, and marched to the weakening beat of the classic discipline. The technical innovation which he had prophesied, though its character was predetermined by his conception of it as a language immediate and all-embracing, was not constructed theoretically. Its origin was physiological, which gives it its absolute superiority over that abandonment of metre which has been a reasoned literary reaction. It is not until he had in Paris immensely deepened his consciousness of his own sensations and ideas (the words are here synonymous) to such a degree that he could not fix them with sufficient rapidity in the conventional forms, that we find him using a liberated technique. That this technique was actually as rigorous as the old will appear when we examine it in detail.

The momentary lifting of restraint which the life of

Paris effected did not continue very long. His capacity for irritation was infinite, because his desire was for absolute freedom. Like a morsel of gas which will fill a vessel no matter how tremendous, Rimbaud, free of cities and countries, battered at the walls of life itself.

Still, at present he was completing his destruction of institutions, and though by the time he came to Paris little of this remained to be done, we may, in the smashing vocables of *Vertige*, measure the extent of his emancipation.

Industriels, princes, sénats :
Périssez ! Puissance, justice, histoire ! à bas ! . . .
Ah ! passez,
Républiques de ce monde ! Des empereurs,
Des régiments, des colons, des peuples ; assez !

He found the company of literary men and artists at first, no doubt, satisfying, but with the speed which characterized everything he did he soon outgrew it, his consciousness enlarged, and his continued contact with that society exasperated the rawness of both parties. It was not perhaps that he disdained Hugo's praise, but that its inadequacy revolted him. "The child Shakespeare" was almost an insult to the adolescent god, the destroyer of humanity engaged in the creation of a new nature! Even in the later days of humiliation and disgust, in the prose poem *Vingt ans* he pulls himself together at the memory of his achievement.

By April 1872, six months after he had first come to the Verlaines', he found Paris intolerable and fled to his refuge-prison, Charleville. It was the first of the series of impulsive flights towards the solitude finally achieved, as that journey to Paris had been his last movement towards the society of men. That voluntary flight *home*, a direction strange for Rimbaud, indicates that he had reached a definite stage in his ascent; he had,

we must believe, reached the culminating point of his ambition, where he lost consciousness of his visions, and he was afraid. He says as much in the narrative of his magical attempt, *L'Alchimie du Verbe*. Of the poems there reprinted, which he chose to illustrate the stages of his progress, the latest we know to be dated June 1872, and that enables us to fix the limit of time to this adventure. The journey to Charleville was not far enough; there, perhaps, he found that the manuscript describing his visions left behind and never since discovered, *La Chasse Spirituelle*, was an incomplete revelation. He had left it in a sealed envelope at the Mautés who, no doubt, thought it might contain incriminating evidence that would be useful, and retained it. Then, too, in the monotonous hell of his little town, where the sneers now meant nothing to him, he could think without prejudice. Perhaps he discovered that he had fled from the very completion of his task, that he had shrunk from the last note of his atrocious fanfare. At any rate, he demands his manuscript, and whilst at home composed a poem in prose, called *Matinée d'Ivresse* which, in the absence of the *Chasse Spirituelle*, we can but regard as a possible type of the poems therein. No doubt he had been tempted, as he confesses in *Une Saison*, by the return of "noble ambitions"; like a Satanic Anthony before whose eyes the forms of all moral and intellectual ideals of loveliness revolved. These ideals which he had slurred with all manner of disdain, returned in the terrible moment in which he doubted himself. He was angry with himself and pitiful too, doubting whether, after all his efforts and sufferings, his magic sophisms might not hide in their angelic phrases only the ordure he had scorned in others. He would not now turn back, he who had promised his created soul a universe built solely from the products of his memory and his senses, he would not

offer it the music of the ancients, the phrases sanctified by time.

A letter of this period, June, shows him acquiring that monstrosity of soul at which he had aimed. It was written after one of his visits to Charleville, and he misses the rivers and caverns of the Ardennes. But the restricted life of the city, particularly oppressive in the summer, exasperates his rawness. "La chaleur n'est pas très constante, mais de voir que le beau temps est dans les intérêts de chacun, et que chacun est un porc, je hais l'été. . . ." He finds a furious satisfaction in deforming words: he would not, if he could help, use the same language as the human pigs—thus Paris, June, and Absinthe become Parmerde, Juinphe, Absomphe. He delights to hover on the brink of incoherence, and afterwards to plunge into a brute sleep.

"C'est le plus délicat et le plus tremblant des habits, que l'ivresse par la vertu de cette sauge des glaciers, l'absomphe! Mais pour, après, se coucher dans la merde!"

He would defile even his own most exquisite vision, and sacrifices that delicious poem, *Les Corbeaux*, just then published in Blémont's *Renaissance*, to the basest usage. It is obviously to himself he refers as the child in *Honte*, who will not cease

Comme un chat des Monts-Rocheux
D'empuantir toutes sphères!

"Le sérieux," he says to his friend, "c'est qu'il faut que tu te tourmentes beaucoup." Yet, in the midst of this implacable disgust, self-disgust, and brutification, he wrote some of the loveliest of his poems. To the preceding weeks belong the most delicate and original of his poems, the *Fêtes de la Patience*, under which title he intended to group *Patience*, *Age d'Or*, *Eternité*, *Bonne Pensée du Matin*, and the prose poem, *Aube*.

It is worth while hearing how he wrote them in his own words, for it is a most sensitive description and whatever he meant by brutification, it intensified and did not deaden his nervous reactions:

"Maintenant, c'est la nuit que je travaince. De minuit à cinq heures du matin. Le mois passé, ma chambre, rue Monsieur-le-Prince, donnait sur un jardin du lycée Saint-Louis. Il y avait des arbres enormes sous ma fenêtre étroite. A trois heures du matin, la bougie pâlit; tous les oiseaux crient à la fois dans les arbres: c'est fini. Plus de travail. Il me fallait regarder les arbres, le ciel, saisis par cette heure indicible, première du matin. Je voyais les dortoirs du lycée, absolument sourds. Et, déjà, le bruit saccadé, sonore, délicieux des tombereaux sur les boulevards. Je fumais ma pipe-marteau, en crachant sur les tuiles, car c'était une mansarde, ma chambre. A cinq heures, je descendais à l'achat de quelque pain; c'est l'heure. Les ouvriers sont en marche partout. C'est l'heure de se soûler chez les marchands de vin, pour moi. Je rentrais manger, et me couchais à sept heures du matin, quand le soleil faisait sortir les cloportes de dessous les tuiles. Le premier matin, en été, et les soirs de décembre, voilà ce qui m'a ravi toujours ici.

"Mais en ce moment, j'ai une chambre folie, sur une cour sans fond mais de trois mètres carrés. . . . Là, je bois de l'eau toute la nuit, je ne vois pas le matin, je ne dors pas, je étouffe. . . ."

The invitation of Verlaine to leave Paris with him came as a relief from the intensity of a concentration which could not be indefinitely endured.

Bon juifs errants.

In July the two friends set off together with no plans and no itinerary beyond the desire to enjoy the moments as they passed wherever they happened to be.

The principal motive in this evasion was to ease the exasperation existing between Verlaine and his wife. If Verlaine was to be disciplined (it was easy to lead him) it must be by a hand at once firm and powerful, like that of his experience-hardened later mistresses. The methods of his wife and mother-in-law merely infuriated him, for in his parents' house he was subjected to a humiliating watch—even his drawers were rifled and his letters opened, he complained. This was the first cause of the separation, but later the Mautés saw in the intimacy with Rimbaud a pretext for permanently ridding themselves of this undesirable son-in-law. His wife had lost all affection for him, and we may guess that she would not have scrupled to exaggerate a point to save herself from a renewal of her repulsive bondage—for Verlaine drunk demanded the appeasement of desires which only a mutual intoxication could have rendered tolerable.

Rimbaud was in a state of mind which was half resignation and half unsatisfied ambition. He had said farewell to the world in some snatches of song and reached an isolation which he could not sustain. The rough draft of the *Alchimie du Verbe*, referring to this period, is quite explicit: "Après ces nobles minutes, stupidité complète. . . . Je ne pouvais plus rien. Les hallucinations tourbillonnaient trop. . . . Je voyageai un peu. J'allai au nord. . . . Je voulus connaître la mer comme si elle eût dû me laver d'une souillure."

In effect it was to Belgium they went, after a misadventure in the Pas-de-Calais. At Arras they had yielded to their delight in mystifying the public, and in the station buffet described loudly and circumstantially crimes they had committed and prisons from which they had escaped. Their too imaginative listeners had them dragged to the police station, where Rimbaud wept crocodile tears and Verlaine fumed like an honest

outraged citizen with such effect that the magistrate ordered them most unconstitutionally to be put on the next train back to Paris. There they walked from the Gare de l'Est to another station and escaped to Belgium, probably to Brussels.

Verlaine had gained his mother's consent to withdraw some of his capital, and with this in his pocket and no one to answer to, he abandoned the past and the future in the absorption in the one present. Rimbaud lent him for the moment his extraordinary curiosity, and that he translated into his own terms:

Soyons deux enfants, soyons deux jeunes filles
Eprises de rien et de toute étonnée. . . .

But there was another side to Verlaine's character which was expressed only too complacently in his later poems, and matches the ideality of *Romances sans paroles* with the *bonhomie* of *Parallèlement*:

Entre autres blamables excès,
Je crois que nous bûmes de tout. . . .

After the first delicious month in which they lived with no thought for the morrow, sleeping in hedges, gutters, or hotels as the mood took them, even this comparative freedom became irksome to Rimbaud and he fixed on Verlaine as the cause of this constraint. Verlaine was the human all too human, and his self-indulgence angered Rimbaud, merciless to himself, who boasted that he had strangled every human joy in his soul. But beneath Verlaine's childish sensuousness Rimbaud had perceived a native nobility netted in the habits of convention; before he himself went off to seek a freer freedom he wanted to restore him to his primitive condition as a son of light. But the chains of sentiment and of the desire for the affection of his wife were already pulling him back and drew down Rimbaud's

angry pity. Read the complaint in *Romances sans paroles*:

O triste, triste était mon âme
A cause, à cause d'une femme . . .

and then consider the impatience of Rimbaud as he expressed it in *Vagabonds*.¹

The incurable frivolity of Verlaine which forced Rimbaud finally to abandon him and his absolute submission to the emotions of the moment are plainly shown in every page of his biography; it is the price he paid for the sincerity of his later poems. If his wife's memoirs are ever published, they will doubtless add further instances of his weakness where none is needed. Such is her account of the conclusion of an attempt at reconciliation which took place in Brussels. Both his petulance and his apparently sincere repentances are as distant as may be from the anger of Rimbaud, which was implacable once he deigned to admit it. The anecdote in question, which is not absolutely reliable, considering its source, is probably substantially true. The younger Madame Verlaine and her mother kept a rendezvous with Verlaine in Brussels at which the conjugal situation was discussed. Verlaine was hankering after his wife and the women made the desertion of Rimbaud a condition of his return. He must have given way on this point, for he went back with them as far as the frontier, but after the customs examination he was not to be found. At last, as the train was about to start, Madame Mauté saw him on the platform and called to him to get in quickly. "No, I am going to stay," he answered, squashing his hat on his head with his fist. They never met again.

The source of Verlaine's sudden courage was no doubt absinthe, and it was under the same influence that

¹ See page 211.

he sent this impossible note after his wife: "Misérable fée Carotte, princesse souris qu'attendent les deux doigts et le pot, vous m'avez fait tout et vous avez peut-être tué le cœur de mon ami. Je rejoins Rimbaud, s'il veut encore de moi après cette trahison que vous m'avez fait faire."

So, after having lived a little of every kind of life for nearly three months, and Verlaine's funds being far from inexhaustible—Rimbaud, of course, had no money at all—it fell to the hard-headed partner in this debauch to remind his friend of the inconveniences of poverty. It hardly mattered where they went so long as it was not the old monotonous life of Paris, and they decided on London as the most inexhaustible and the most likely field to repay their suddenly industrious intentions.

They crossed to Dover early in September and found a lodging in Howland Street, off Tottenham Court Road, where Verlaine had a number of friends among the proscribed Communists. Soon the poets began to drift apart. Verlaine grumbles because he cannot get an absinthe in a beer-shop, and he was alone on the occasion he describes. Rimbaud had prophesied a return to sobriety in a poem, the *Comédie de la Soif*, some months before and the renunciation of such artificial landscapes.

Plus ces paysages,
Qu'est l'ivresse, amis?

J'aime autant, mieux même,
Pourrir dans l'étang,
Sous l'affreuse crème,
Près des bois flottants.

Though he had in all probability given up absinthe at this time, he was not yet abstemious or industrious. London had to be explored, and the friends penetrated the city and took a boat as far as Woolwich and

Gravesend. The amazing *Croquis Londoniennes* in Verlaine's letters tell us all we shall ever know about these wanderings, but something of the impression made by the great confusion of the city will be found in such *Illuminations* as *Villet*, *Métropolitain*, *Promontoire*.

In the meantime a change was coming over Rimbaud. Just as in 1871 he despised his poems of the year before, now he began to despise the ambitions of the months in Paris. "Il faut être absolument moderne," he said, and we can see a reflection of his teaching when Verlaine praises the interminable docks and says that his own poetic is becoming more and more modernist. He slowly emerged from the trance-like condition in which he had lived so long, an emergence dictated partly by physical debility,¹ partly by the failure to discover in it any essential satisfaction.

As he returned then to the ordinary life he became aware of its exigencies and of the insufficiency of Verlaine as a permanent comrade in arms. He used to go to the Reading Room of the British Museum, partly to satisfy his still active curiosity, partly to acquire that knowledge of negotiable value on which he now set his heart. He bought a silk hat for ten shillings and conserved it carefully, and caressed it with his elbow. He wore it in Charleville when he went back to his native town, and I see in this a desire, now newly sprung and later strengthened, to show the bourgeois that he could beat them at their own game.

If Rimbaud was bound to Verlaine now principally by material motives, the latter was no less an emotional parasite on his friend. He was miserable enough in London, which is such an inhospitable city to the poor

¹ "La même mégé bourgeois à tous les points où la melle nous déposera! Le plus dénuencé physique sans qu'il n'en soit possible de se soustraire à toute atmosphère personnelle, brève de remords psychique, dont la formation est de la une affection."

stranger. There is no comfort in England but of the domestic kind, and the public-houses of the west central district were a poor substitute for the Paris cafés. Rimbaud's preparations for independence worried Verlaine, who was left alone for long stretches of time. The action taken by his wife now demanded a complete divorce, alleging in particular immoral relations between the two friends. Partly in response to his mother's advice to solve the situation by leaving Verlaine, partly for his own reasons, Rimbaud decided to return to Charleville. Poor Verlaine was faced with the loss of the two people whose affection he most desired. Whilst all the families of England were privately gorging themselves on Boxing Day 1872 he wrote from his cheerless lodgings, after a meal of "exquisite goose," and said: "Bien triste, pourtant. Tout seul. Rimbaud que tu ne connais pas, et que je suis le seul à connaître n'est plus là. Vide affreux. Le reste m'est égal, c'est des canailles."

In the last week in December Rimbaud left for Charleville and Madame Verlaine came to stay with her son, to bring him news and discuss with him the separation from his wife. Soon she returned to Paris and Verlaine fretted himself into a breakdown. Thinking that he was dying he wrote farewell letters and summoned his wife (by telegram), his mother, and Rimbaud to his death-bed. This attempt to gain by a display of weakness what was refused him for sufficient reasons is typical of the man, but of course his wife did not respond. His mother, brave woman, rushed to help him, and two days afterwards Rimbaud, having been obliged to write to Madame Verlaine for his fare, also arrived. Between them they coaxed the invalid back to life. It was decided that he should pass his convalescence in the country, and early in April he went to stay with an aunt at Bouillon, in Belgian Luxembourg. Rimbaud had returned home.

Madame Rimbaud owned a farm at Roche, in the Ardennes, but at some distance from Charleville. The farm buildings had been destroyed by fire and she moved there with her family to supervise the rebuilding. This did not suit Rimbaud, who grumbles, "*La mother m'a mis dans un triste trou.*" He has to walk more than five miles if he wants a drink in the evening. He misses even Charleville and the Paris cafés and the Bibliothèque. The day before yesterday, he says, he went to see the Prussians—the troops still occupying the frontier provinces—and adds "*ça m'a ragaillardé.*" His hatred found this immense satisfaction in seeing his countrymen humiliated by the invaders. But now he is in revolt against himself and mocks his most delicious impulses; "*la contemplotate de la Nature m'absorculant tout entier.*" And here is the way he announces the birth of *Une Saison en Enfer*: "*Je travaille pourtant assez régulièrement; je fais des petites histoires en prose, titre général: Livre païen, ou Livre nègre. C'est bête et innocent. O innocence! innocence; innocence, innoc . . . fléau!*"

He is as usual horribly bored—not a book, not a cabaret within reach, not any happening in the street. "*Mon sort dépend de ce livre, pour lequel une demi-douzaine d'histoires atroces sont encore à inventer. Comment inventer des atrocités ici? Je ne t'envoie pas d'histoires, quoique j'en aie déjà trois; ça coûte tant!*"

Verlaine had proposed a rendezvous at Bouillon with Rimbaud and Delahaye, and it was here, near the end of May, that the two poets met again. Both were bored with the country, Verlaine was disappointed of the absurdly hoped for meeting with his wife, and both needed some means of earning money. After a week's wandering in Belgium they took the boat from Antwerp to London—an economical route. There they found lodgings at 8 Great College Street, Camden Town, and

set seriously to work. This, the third stay of the pair in London, is undoubtedly described in *Délires I*—the friendship with Verlaine and his literary ambitions appeared to Rimbaud the two greatest follies of his life.

Rimbaud set out very seriously to earn his living. He was not a bohemian, and horrible as it may seem, even his dissipation had been indulged in for an ulterior motive. So when he turned his energies in another direction—that of acquiring independence by frenzied work—it did no violence to his nature. His mother had only too thoroughly stamped out of him when he was young the precious faculty for wasting his time. With Verlaine it was very different. They quarrelled and Rimbaud says with simplicity in his deposition, they quarrelled because they had everything in common, and though their existence depended on their mutual exertions he had to reproach him with “his idleness and his manner of behaving among our acquaintances” —the last being most important as they wished to give private lessons in French, and for this, of course, good recommendations would be essential.

At the best they earned a dozen francs a week, and such a paltry life was not likely to ease Rimbaud's irritation. He plunged into the study of English as a means of escape. Their quarrels were frequent. Verlaine, if we may believe a sonnet of his, would wake Rimbaud in the night to ask him if the soul were immortal! His mother wrote from Brussels to say that she had arranged a meeting with his wife, and that a reconciliation was almost certain. Rimbaud told him that that was unlikely, and that it would be better to keep at their work. Unable and unwilling to submit to a reasoning which did not please him, and perhaps to prove to his wife that he had done with Rimbaud, he flung off without any warning and took the boat to Antwerp.

Once on his way he felt remorse for his desertion of

Rimbaud, who was left with hardly any money. He wrote to him on the boat saying that he had sent for his wife, and that if she did not come within three days he would shoot himself. Rimbaud wrote two letters asking Verlaine to return to London as he was stranded, or else help him to cross to Brussels. It was then Verlaine telegraphed him his address at Brussels and the money for the fare. On Tuesday, 10th July 1873, he rejoined Verlaine in the hotel where he was staying with his mother (it was not a house of ill fame, as Mr. George Moore characteristically describes it), and found him in a very nervous and undecided state. Verlaine could not fail to see that his wife's failure to accept his meeting-place was a final and definite refusal to have anything to do with him. He wanted to go back to London with Rimbaud, but the latter feared the ridicule from the friends who had seen their undignified departures; he himself had decided to go to Paris. As soon as Verlaine heard this he wanted to go to Paris himself and have the law on his wife and parents-in-law; then he would not go with Rimbaud because of the sad memories these old places would revive. The only thing that mattered now was that Rimbaud should stay with him, and as the latter remained determined to go away by himself Verlaine passed from rage to despair and back again; there was no coherency in his ideas. On Wednesday evening he drank excessively and went out at six o'clock on Thursday morning. He came back drunk at midday and showed Rimbaud a revolver he had just bought, saying, "It's for you, for me, for everybody."

Whilst they were in the room together with Madame Verlaine, her son went out several times to get a drink. He persisted in preventing Rimbaud from going to Paris alone, but the latter was determined, and as he had no money, asked for his fare from Verlaine's mother.

Verlaine locked the door opening on to the landing and sat down in front of it on a chair; Rimbaud was leaning against the opposite wall. Rimbaud still refusing to stay with him, he called out something like "Voilà pour toi, puisque tu pars," and fired twice in quick succession. The first shot hit Rimbaud in the wrist, the second was not aimed at him and struck the floor.

This was the most dramatic moment of the quarrel, but it was not the definite rupture. It was only a repetition of the quarrels in London, the material difference—that Verlaine had a revolver—did not affect the moral situation. Rimbaud saw in Verlaine an image of the weaknesses in his own nature. Had he not said, "Je veux que ce bras durci ne traîne plus un cher image?"¹ His mind was made up and the decisive action was taken by him a few hours later; Verlaine's pistol shot made little difference to him really.

As soon as the shots were fired Verlaine fell into the depths of remorse and despair. He ran into the adjoining room, threw himself on the bed, and begged Rimbaud to shoot him. His mother calmed him, and about five o'clock they went to a hospital to have the wound, which was slight, properly dressed. Rimbaud would not be persuaded to stay any longer, but stated his desire to return to Charleville, and for this purpose Madame Verlaine gave him twenty francs. They all walked together towards the station, Verlaine talking very wildly, fidgeting with the pistol in his pocket, and beseeching him not to go away. When they reached

¹ In the prose poem *Ouvriers*. I by no means think that Henrietta, the "cher image" referred to, stands for Verlaine. She, I think, is a half-ironical personification of Rimbaud's poetic, which he had decided to abandon. Verlaine being most closely associated with that ambition had to go too. Notice that the sense of irony returns as the poetic impulse diminishes.

a certain square Verlaine, who was a few steps ahead, turned suddenly round in such a way that Rimbaud feared another attack and turned to run. Verlaine followed him, waving, calling, threatening perhaps, till, happening at this moment to meet a policeman, he claimed his protection and Verlaine was arrested. That was the action which determined their subsequent lives. It was done, perhaps, in real panic by Rimbaud, perhaps from a calculation that this was the most efficient way of getting clear from Verlaine. At worst he would not have expected him to suffer more than a night in the police-station. He could not have foreseen the absurd sentence of two years' imprisonment which was passed on Verlaine for this affair.

Rimbaud was obliged to remain in hospital, as the bullet was still in his wrist. It was there that the deposition was taken from which we have drawn most of the above details. This document gives a cold and concise summary of the affair, its tone is as disinterested as may be, as though he were narrating the actions of some ants or children. There is no accusation brought against Verlaine, but the general impression an intelligent judge would have drawn was that Rimbaud meant to imply the irresponsibility of Verlaine. "Je ne puis trouver aucun mobile *sérieux* à l'attentat qu'il a commis sur moi," he says from his great distance, with that complete incomprehension of sentimental attachments which characterizes most of his work. And is not this exactly in the tone of a nursemaid exonerating her charge: "Il était en état d'ivresse, il avait bu dans la matinée, comme il a, du rest, l'habitude de le faire quand il est livré à lui-même."

On the 20th July Rimbaud rejoined his family at Roche; his arm was still in a sling and he appeared very depressed. He was, as usual, taciturn, and shut himself up in a loft to finish the *livre païen*, or *livre nègre*, of

which he had written to Delahaye in May. "Mon sort dépend de ce livre," he had told him, meaning no doubt at the moment, though the words have, retrospectively, a deeper meaning, that his mother was willing to pay for the printing of it as an ordeal by the failure or success of which as a means of earning money she would conform her future discipline. In May he had written three of the prose poems which compose the *Saison en Enfer*. In London he had drafted *L'Alchimie du Verbe* and the *Prologue Abandonné*; the former appears much more highly wrought in its present state. Between the 20th July, then, and the date in August when he took the manuscript to a publisher in Brussels, he must have worked pretty hard—not in quantity, but in concentration.

Besides the juvenile poem, *Les Etrennes des Orphelins*, and *Les Corbeaux*, Rimbaud saw nothing of his own in print beyond this *Une Saison en Enfer*.¹ He received some copies from the printer towards the end of October and sent one or two of these to the few people he thought still his friends—most certainly to Delahaye, a true friend, and a bundle of three or four to the artist, J. L. Forain, to give to Jean Richepin and Raoul Ponchon, young writers then in opposition to the Parnassians. It was a strange year for Paris when Lautréaumont, Corbière, and Rimbaud each put out their work amid complete indifference.

It is said that a mass of over 400 copies, the bulk of the edition, has been found in Brussels. It is very probable, and contradicts the picturesque account of his wholesale destruction of his work. Certainly he burnt

¹ *Une Saison en Enfer*, Bruxelles, Alliance typographique (M. de Poot et Cie), 37 rue aux Choux, 1873. It is a pamphlet, in-18, of fifty-three pages, with grey paper covers. The title is in red on this cover, in the centre. "A. Rimbaud" on the top in black. The price is printed a little below the title, 1 franc.

his early work, for not a poem has come to us from the family. He considered it a folly and had printed a few specimens in *Une Saison*. But if he had really thrown on the fire the whole edition, on which good money had been spent, the protest from his mother would surely have embedded itself in the memory of the sister who wrote her reminiscences of Arthur. Impatient, probably, that the fifes and drums of Paris delayed so long to mourn his departure from the world of letters, he disembarassed himself of the incriminating early poems, and set off to the capital to find out the cause of the silence. His valediction to poetry was unalterably sincere, but it lost most of its charm for him if he could not see the astonishment on the faces of the spectators.

In Paris he revisited the quarter in which he used to stay, and in the evening took a seat in the Café Tabourey, near the Odéon. Other young writers and artists whom he knew (they included even those to whom he had sent copies) were seated at tables near him, and pointed him out, and sneered, and circulated some garbled version of the Brussels affair such as Mr. Moore picked up. They believed it was he who had ruined Verlaine. Rimbaud, of course, did not flinch and stayed at his table in his impenetrable silence. Presently a young Southerner, more generous, or more curious by temperament, left the crowd and introduced himself to Rimbaud as an admirer of his poems. Rimbaud told him that he was no longer interested in writing, that he would get his poetry travelling; that he had just looked in here (was this a magnificent improvisation?) on his way to London, where the people were more open-minded, and more truly intelligent. He displayed the advantages of London life so seductively that Germain Nouveau, the young man who had braved the dominant opinion, enquired eagerly when he was going to start and if he might join him. Rimbaud

replied that he was leaving next day, that it was all the same to him if Nouveau joined him or not; that in any case their life would not be an easy one.

They reached London together and at first found work making wooden boxes. When he had thus extended his knowledge of English, Rimbaud found a position in a school through an educational agency and advised Nouveau to do the same. In this way, some time in 1874, they became separated, and Rimbaud, who was now filled with a mania for learning languages, moved to Germany. He visited Charleville in January 1875 and persuaded his mother to give him a little money, and he lived on this with anything additional he might earn by giving lessons. In February he was at Stuttgart, apparently as tutor in a German family, discontented but determined to acquire his independence, even to the extent of having visiting-cards printed and inserting an advertisement in the newspapers.

During these many months Verlaine had been lying in prison in Brussels and Mons. He continued to send Rimbaud specimens of his work, some of the poems of *Sagesse*, but only through their friend Delahaye, as the former would not communicate with him directly. In one letter he informed him of his return to the Catholic Church, and begged him to do the same. Rimbaud's comment was not sympathetic. Owing to good conduct Verlaine gained a remission of his sentence and was released in February, and, with hardly a friend but his mother, rushed at once to Rimbaud, whose address had been given him by Delahaye. "Aimons-nous en Jésus," Verlaine had written Rimbaud from prison. A few days after their meeting, the last, Rimbaud scribbles a note to Delahaye in which his one-time friend is not maliciously, but ruthlessly, disposed of. "Verlaine est arrivé ici l'autre jour, un chapelet aux pinces . . . trois heures après on avait renié son dieu et fait saigner les

98 plaies de N.S. Il est resté deux jours et demi, fort raisonnable et sur me rémonstration s'en est retourné à Paris, pour, de suite, aller finir d'étudier *là-bas dans l'île*." More fully, as soon as the two met they went to have a drink, with the result that Verlaine, after his long sobriety, quickly became drunk and Rimbaud's scepticism assumed its old ascendancy. No doubt he kept the upper hand all the time Verlaine was with him, and it was when he became bored with the latter's pleading for a return to life in common that, whilst they were walking in the Black Forest, he gave him that drubbing which he refers to as a remonstrance. The day before this he had handed him some manuscripts to read and to pass on to Germain Nouveau, then in Brussels.¹ In this way Verlaine and Nouveau became acquainted and met when the former was school-mastering at Stickney.

It is at this point that the question may be answered as to whether Rimbaud completely ceased writing when he finished *Une Saison en Enfer*. It is unlikely that so immense a vibration should have been stilled at once. Though for some time back he might have experienced a diminution of ambition, *Une Saison* is a genuine renunciation; he abdicates in the height of power, and with pain, not in exhaustion. If anything may be dated after August 1873 it is the *Illuminations Jeunesse* and *Vies*, which from the mental states to which they refer, could not have been written much before the *Saison*, though of course they may have been written at the same time and discarded as unsuitable. "Je suis réellement d'outre-tombe, et pas de commissions" is the sort of thing which he might have written in a posthumous struggle.

¹ Possibly *some* of the MSS. of *Les Illuminations*. There are several confused accounts of the source of the little book printed in 1886 with that title, but none which would seem to justify the statement that it was published at Rimbaud's initiative.

The man with whom he went to England, Germain Nouveau, was a poet of some individuality, so it was not until after Stuttgart that he was completely cut off from literary relationship. Then, absorbed in the needs of the moment and his desire for a universal proficiency, he might have said, like Beddoes in the midst of his anatomy, "I find literary wishes fading pretty fast." His last words on poetry and letters are contained in a letter of October of this year.

"Je ne commente pas les dernières grossièretés du Loyola, et je n'ai plus d'activité à me donner de ce côté-là à présent, comme il paraît que la 2^e 'portion du contingent de la classe' 74 va-t-êtré appelée le trois novembre suiv^t. ou prochain," and he scribbles a burlesque rhyme on the hungry conscripts whom he so much dreaded he might have to join.

The "dernières grossièretés du Loyola" were the latest verses destined to form part of *Sagesse*, such as that beginning

O mon Dieu vous m'avez blessé d'amour¹

which Isabelle Rimbaud, believing it to be her brother's, extracted from the latrine to which his contempt had abandoned it. So far as any written records show, that was the last thought Rimbaud ever gave to literature. Fear of conscription and the necessity of living freely are from now onwards his apparent motives. As the tremendous impulse which flung him out of the orbit of his heredity exhausts itself he returns more and more closely to the ancestral path. But for the restless spirit of his father, who could not submit to domesticity, he might have stayed in Charleville and made a fortune.

¹ The *grossièreté* was, from Rimbaud's point of view, the humble and contrite tone of Verlaine's petitions. Berrichon said he detested the poems because they were in regular verse, a superficial observation.

Whilst this unrest drives him ceaselessly through space, in other respects he falls under his mother's, his original, domination. It may be that because she held the purse-strings he had to court her favours, but I do not think that finally her cast of mind was uncongenial to him. His continual preoccupation with money is quite in her manner. At the Stuttgart boarding-house he will have nothing to do with inclusive terms at sixty francs a month; on his last agonizing journey in a litter, with his swollen leg, hundreds of miles, he yet has strength to include in his briefest notes the fines exacted from the carriers who set him on the ground carelessly; he does not forget to record the price of his artificial leg. Even in the letter from which we have last quoted he makes extensive enquiries, which show her influence, as to the conditions of the B.Sc. examination, which years ago he would have heartily reviled. He could not, after all, subdue his restlessness to that extent, but from time to time in his exile he cries out for rest and security. All that is left to sight is a smouldering exasperation.

IX

WANDERINGS

EUROPE

HIS need of movement increased. His impatience passed the bounds of pedagogic possibilities and he turned to the immenser field of commerce and industry. By November 1875 he decided that he knew enough German, and that Italy must be his next prey. He sold his few belongings and took the train to the foot of the Alps, then crossed over on foot by the St. Gothard pass, as the tunnel was only then being built.

On foot he reached Milan, where a charitable woman took pity on his fatigue and sheltered him for a while. It was at this time that he asked Delahaye to return the copy of *Une Saison en Enfer* he had given him. His hostess, whoever she was, seems to have been a cultivated woman, but the incident is obscure. Rested, he set out for Brindisi, intending to take ship there for one of the islands of the Aegean, where he knew that a friend of Verlaine was managing a soap factory. After reaching Sienna he broke down, the strain of paying his way with casual labour as he went being too great for him. A good-natured Consul took care of him and gave him a passage to Marseilles. There he was obliged to remain in hospital for a month, and afterwards enlisted in the Carlist ranks, but the end of the rising brought that adventure to nothing. He returned to Charleville, and spent the rest of the winter picking up the Arabian and Russian languages. He also hired a piano and, though he could not play, amused himself by deducing

a theory of music from his own practice. In the spring he again attempted to reach the Aegean, and struggled as far as Vienna. There, somehow, he lost all his money in a street-row. At any rate, the police expelled him as a destitute foreigner, and he was passed from frontier to frontier and finally dumped in France. Then he walked back to the Ardennes.

Delahaye found him amiable and pliant during these returns to his home. He worked willingly about the farm, but was pathetically grateful for the diversion of a walk with one of his old school-friends. He let them always choose the direction, and had only one whim, which was to drink his glass of beer at the *pleasantest* café. For a moment he thought of getting to China as a lay missionary, but instead walked through Belgium to Holland. There he met with a recruiting sergeant who persuaded him to join the Colonial army. This he did on 19th May 1876, and received the equivalent of 600 francs, entering on a six years' engagement. In June he sailed with a draft for Java, and disembarked at Batavia on 23rd July. Garrison discipline was not of the kind to attract him, and three weeks later he disappeared. He spent a month wandering in the interior, satisfying for a time his need of the exotic, but since he was bound to be exposed as a deserter sooner or later if he stayed on the island, he joined an English sailing-ship, rounded the Cape, and reached Liverpool, where he got himself repatriated. The remains he left in the barracks at Batavia were sold for three francs and the proceeds presented to an orphanage. His name was struck off the rolls.

He did not stay long at Charleville but, envying the money gained by the man who had recruited him, set out for Cologne. In a bar there he got into conversation with some young Germans, sang the praise of life in the Dutch Colonial army, enticed about a dozen of them

to go with him to Holland. There he got a handsome price for them with which he went to Hamburg. The sight of a casino enticed him, and he thought he would increase his fortune but was instead, of course, completely cleaned out. Fortunately there was a circus in the town to whom the services of a polyglot gatekeeper were useful. Rimbaud, acquainted with the coinage of many nations, could be trusted to deliver the tickets with dispatch and accuracy. In this way he journeyed as far as Copenhagen, but wishing to penetrate even farther North, he left the circus and went on to Stockholm. He found nothing to do there, so went to the Consul and was returned to his own country. The North, however, was becoming intolerable to him except in the summer, and at the end of 1877 he made another attempt on the East. He embarked at Marseilles, but fell ill from exhaustion, and was landed in Italy. As soon as he was well enough he went to Rome and made his way thence to Charleville again.

At home he was obliged to rest in order to recuperate after his extraordinary exertions. It was then that he began to consider some more fruitful outlet for his energy than this continual coming and going. He studied books of algebra and geometry and particularly the applied sciences.

At the end of 1878 he fled from the Northern winter, crossed on foot a part of the Vosges and the St. Gothard for the second time—on this occasion in a snowstorm which he brightly describes in a letter. The niggardly hospitality in the famous hostel brings out his latent sarcasm.

In November he is at Alexandria with a small job from a French engineer. Thanks to this man in December he obtained an appointment in Cyprus superintending the extraction of stone from a quarry. He was in charge of the native labourers, sometimes as

many as sixty, to whom he distributed the explosive charges. He was also responsible for their payment. One day he writes that he has been obliged to ask for arms, as the workmen, in a fit of drunkenness, had pillaged the cash-box. Rimbaud faced the situation, went round to each one, explained the unfairness of their action, and induced them to return the greater part of their spoils. His force of personality was already considerable, and it did not cease to develop with the years.

The quarry of which Rimbaud was in charge was situated in the desert, near the seashore, a treeless, unhealthy spot for a white man, and early in the summer of 1879 he was obliged to return home with typhoid fever. It was here that Delahaye saw him for the last time, on the farm at Roche. He himself opened the rustic gate and his features brightened at the sight of his friend. His cheeks were hollowed, sunburnt, and furrowed; he had a beard. He appeared grave and self-reliant. After dinner Delahaye ventured to ask him if he still thought about literature. He shook his head, with a little smile, half amused, as though he were accused of something childish, and answered quietly: "Je ne m'occupe plus de ça."

In the autumn his fever returned, and attributing it to the climate, he set out again for Alexandria, but at Marseilles he had so bad a relapse that he was obliged to return to Roche. He spent the winter there, studying mathematics and only happy in the warmth of the stables. He left again in the spring of 1880, and the next eleven years were spent entirely in the East. Though the promise with which he concluded his writings, "to enter splendid towns," had so far sustained him, the conditions of this freedom, hardship, and uncertainty began to eat into his patience.

AFRICA

The story of Rimbaud in Africa is one to which this tale of the writer is only introductory. Fascinating as the account would be, we have not here the space to develop it, nor have we undertaken the research among the documents of these years which would justify a definitive appreciation. A number of people, however, have seen in Rimbaud, the pioneer and explorer, a being superior to Rimbaud the poet. Certainly the finest qualities in his character found expression in these last ten years; his indefatigable energy, his integrity, initiative, and self-control, for which all that has gone before was, perhaps, only a training, were brought into play. This must always be remembered when we draw remarks from his letters which may seem to disparage his character, to show him principally as a merchant. Though his motive appears simply that of gaining an independence, the manner in which he did it shows his greatness, and to that of course he does not refer. If we had no other information but the letters of these twelve years we should not, it has been very truly remarked, have the slightest suspicion of the existence of either Art or Religion, so completely had he shed his old skin. We may be sure that for every franc he gained he gave infinitely of his strength and initiative. He became legendary among the natives. Indeed, he resembles the best type of English explorer—moral, almost in spite of themselves, and driven by some impulse which nothing will quench to this ceaseless expenditure of energy. The unmoral impulse of the *Illuminations* ended in this absolute morality, once he had seen in the *Saison en Enfer* the futility of his revolt. But notice that it could only be put into practice in the absence of social obligations. Only the fool or the idealist would despise him for piling franc on franc, as

we see him doing in his letters. That is one side of his activity. He lived the life of the ordinary man, but he lived it better, more strongly, believing it the only way of wiping out the memory of the literary ambitions which he regarded as a foolish dissipation.

In May 1880, having found nothing to do in Egypt, he went over to Cyprus and was for a short time in charge of the building of a summer residence for the Governor-General, and in the pay of the English Government. After two months he had a dispute with the paymaster and his chief and left there with 400 francs. He then wandered along the shore of the Red Sea looking for a suitable job and at last settled in Aden, where a coffee merchant payed him seven francs a day.

Presently we hear that all the receipts of the business pass through his hands, and that unless he is given a position of trust and better paid, rather than be exploited he will go away. Aden is an airless furnace, a rock, without a tree or blade of grass. Here, as always now, he is troubled with more or less severe pains in the head and limbs.

In November we hear that he has been appointed agent of the branch of Mazon, Viannay, and Bardey, at Harrar, one of the most important towns in Abyssinia but at that time without railway communications to the coast. He arrived there in December, after twenty days on horseback across the Somali desert. It is a large town of about 40,000 people, and trade consisted in exchanging goods of European manufacture for the ivory, gold, skins, gums, and perfumes of the surrounding country. Rimbaud seemed to be happy there, the land being high and the climate fairly temperate. He interested himself in natural history, in photography, and all kinds of crafts, from brass-founding to the making of candles. There was plenty to be done simply

in the way of trade, and, being paid by commission as well as by salary, he was very active. Soon we hear of him going farther up country in search of camels.

By next spring he was disappointed with his work and the country and all that it contains. "Could we only enjoy a few years of real rest in this life! Happily this life is the only one, and that is evident since one cannot imagine another life more tedious than this." That is in the tone of many letters to come.

From others we learn that as soon as work begins on the Panama Canal he has decided to go there. None the less he asks for more handbooks and some seeds of the sugar-beet. Till January 1882 he frets at Harrar, where he is in sole charge for a time, makes excursions into the surrounding countries, but his letters are filled with complaints about the dullness of his life and affairs of money.

When he returned to Aden he continued to work for the same business house with more or less satisfaction to himself. He has various projects, most of which are grounded on the desire to go *elsewhere*. He asks for instruments for map-making, for elephant hunting, and a photographic apparatus. Then the idea comes to him to amass quickly some 50,000 francs and marry with that. In the midst of these indecisions he is sent again to Harrar as chief. There, in 1883, he wrote one of the most self-revealing of his letters which, as such are rare, may be quoted:

"Solitude is a wretched thing, down here, and I am sorry that I am not married and have not a family of my own. But, at present, I am condemned to wander, bound to a distant undertaking, and every day I lose my taste for the climate and the way of living and even the language of Europe.

"Alas, to what end are these comings and goings, and these fatigues and adventures among strange races,

and these languages with which one fills the memory, and these nameless labours, if I cannot one day, in a few years time, rest in a place which almost pleases me and find a family and have at least a son whom I shall pass the rest of my life bringing up in my own notions, adorning and arming him with the most complete education that one can attain in this age and whom I shall see become a renowned engineer, a man rich and powerful through *science*? But who knows how long my days will endure, among these mountains? And I could disappear, in the midst of these savage peoples, without the news ever leaking out.

"You speak to me of political affairs. If you knew how indifferent I am to that! For more than two years I have not touched a paper. All these discussions are incomprehensible to me, now. Like the Mussulmans, I know that what is to come comes, and that is all.

"The only thing which interests me is news of the family, and I am always glad to linger over the pictures of your work in the fields. It is a pity that it is so cold and cheerless with you, in the winter."

Business was brisk at Harrar this time and he appeared busy and contented when the Soudanese War rendered trading impossible and the firm's agencies, both in Harrar and Aden, were closed down (1884). He left Harrar with 40,000 francs profit. At Aden his life became a nightmare again, owing to the climate and his forced inactivity. He saw himself condemned to live in exile for many years, perhaps for ever, for in those regions he had become known and can render certain services, and be sure of finding a job. In France he would be a foreigner and find nothing to do. He realizes that he is thirty, that half his life is gone, and that he has roamed the world with nothing to show for it. One of the partners of his old firm started business again, and Rimbaud was re-engaged. Though he frets

at the monotony of his work and the stupidity of his companions, he sees that everywhere the conditions of labour are equally vile. He talks of going to Bombay, where even now he would be able to live on the interest on his capital—eight francs a day, as he calculates it. His reputation in those parts is good, he says, and makes one of the rare references to the past. “Si j’ai en des moments malheureux, auparavant, je n’ai jamais cherché à vivre aux dépens des gens, ni au moyen du mal.” He offered his mother the use of his savings once; his own needs being negligible.

At this time the Rimbaud cult began to spread in France, for Verlaine had published his essay in the *Poètes Maudits*, giving large selections from his early work (1883 and 1884). When Rimbaud did hear of this he became furious, because, I think, it was his *early* work which, so plainly self-revealing, he considered might adversely affect his reputation. For the moment commerce was ruined by the English military campaigns. “Their Gordon is an idiot, their Wolseley an ass, and all their undertakings a senseless succession of absurdities and depredations. But England has at least important prospects in view, whilst France simply wastes her money, spending it on useless regions.” So he sums up the international situation.

He continued to trade in coffee principally, as much as three million francs passing through his hands in one year. He buys also, among other substances, gums, incense, ostrich plumes, ivory, hides, etc.

Even if he returned to France, he says, he would be obliged to go down to the Mediterranean for the winter. And all the money he has, he writes, with a touch of the old disdain, would only procure him marriage with a poor and honest woman, such as one can find anywhere. “Do not count on my becoming less of a vagabond,” he warns them at home. “On the contrary, if I had

the means to travel without being forced to stay and work for my living, one would not see me two months in the same place. The world is full of magnificent countries that the united lives of a thousand men would not suffice to visit." He cannot live always in one place, he says, and if he had a small income he would pass the year in two or three countries, living quietly and passing his time intelligently in some interesting work.

He finds his existence in Aden intolerable. Scorched, labouring from seven to five every day, without a day's rest, drinking only water, not smoking at all, and in bad health! The fire-eaters and exploiters of all the nations of Europe are fighting for pieces of the continent. The only Europeans in Aden are idiots who lose all their earnings at billiards.

After a temporary disagreement with his firm Rimbaud leaves them, and with a partner invests his capital in old rifles. These he intends to sell to Menelik II, King of Ethiopia, and for this purpose he moves to Tadjourah to form a caravan.

The journey involved to Ankober, the capital of Abyssinia, is long, two months at least across deserts infested with bands of Bedouins incensed against the Europeans who had interfered with their traffic in slaves. Rimbaud did not deal in slaves, as has sometimes been stated. He looks forward to a profit of 30,000 francs on this enterprise, with which he will return to Europe and lay in stock to enable him to trade on his own out there. He longs too for the cool climate of Abyssinia, and the inhabitants, he says, are Christian and hospitable. After a series of delays lasting a whole year Rimbaud's partner became ill and returned to Europe; so Rimbaud, having learnt the language, organized and directed the caravan himself and led it on his tremendous journey. He reached the chief town of Choa safely. He was there in April 1887, but in August we find him back in

Cairo, with only the capital with which he had begun to show for the labour, initiative, and anxieties of the past eighteen months. His partner had died and he had lost his own profit settling up his debts and helping a child he had left. His health is failing, his hair is completely grey, and he is weighed down with the 43,000 francs which he carries continually in his belt. In his previous stays at Harrar he had thought of describing the surrounding country. From Antotto (Abyssinia) he boldly made his way through unexplored regions back to Harrar. The notes of this journey were sent to the Société de Géographie, which published them in November 1887.

At the same time he suggested to *Le Temps* that he should send reports on the operations of the Italian army in Abyssinia, and says that he has actually sent articles to that paper and the *Figaro*. He asked his mother the name of the most influential paper in the Ardennes, and she told him the *Courrier des Ardennes*, a little religious paper to which she subscribed. "I intend to send that paper some interesting accounts of my travels in East Africa" Rimbaud told her, in the hope of contradicting his reputation as a waster. "Je crois que cela ne peut pas me faire du tort," he says pathetically.

This hesitating excursion into journalism came to an abrupt end. He had met some men with capital and formed the plan of building a small-arms factory on the shores of the Red Sea. He asked for the necessary authorization which was at first given him, but later an agreement between the Great Powers put an end to the enterprise.

In the early summer of 1888 he returned to Harrar and opened a trading station on his own account. For a time he appears contented in his work and profits, but soon the monotony of sedentary toil comes over

him again. He curses the country and the people in terms almost identical with those he had used against his fellow townsmen when he was a schoolboy.

He fears that his intelligence will become deadened from lack of educated companionship. To kill these persistent questionings lest they take the form of regrets for his renunciation, he flings himself into his work and spends his sleepless nights with handbooks and dictionaries. Through his integrity of conduct he has gained prestige among the inhabitants, and that is his only satisfaction. He tears off on mad gallops into the hills and this, coupled with his unceasing exertions, brought about his early death. For in these rides among the mountains his knee banged against some protrusion on the saddle which, repeated numberless times, set up a synovitis in the right knee. He neglected it till he could not move without intolerable pain, and even then had a hammock set up where he could watch the weighing and measuring of the merchandise. The whole leg became affected and his body was racked with pains. There was no medical aid within hundreds of miles, so at last he decided to return to the coast. He sold his business at a loss, and as he could not even ride horse or camel, he engaged sixteen men to act as bearers to a kind of litter. He left at the end of March and this terrible journey lasted nearly a fortnight. On one of the early days he became separated with his bearers (for he could not move an inch himself) from the rest of the caravan, and was caught in a rainstorm beneath which he was obliged to remain without cover for sixteen hours. It was thirty hours before he broke his fast again. At last they reached Zeilah, where four hours by boat took him to Aden. After some days spent in settling up with his partner in Aden, he went into hospital, where he was treated by an English doctor who, after a fortnight, advised him to return to Europe.

In the hospital at Marseilles, other treatment having failed, his leg was amputated above the knee. His subsequent letters are pathetic. He whom Verlaine had called "wind-shod" could only hobble ridiculously on crutches.

He had decided to return to France that summer to get married he writes, and now "Adieu mariage, adieu famille, adieu avenir! Ma vie est passé. Je ne suis plus qu'un tronchon immobile." Apart from his pain, inactivity alone was torment to such a man, and the thought of discipline intolerable. He fretted himself even now, with his one leg, lest he should be liable to the conscription laws. He tells his sister to take extraordinary precautions so that the postal authorities should not discover his whereabouts. His last letters show him in the depths of misery, but still proud enough to sneer at his own complainings.

At the end of July he returned to the farm at Roche, where his sister Isabelle nursed him with great devotion. The account of his last days will be found in her *Reliques*, from which we extract a few details.

The amputated leg remained tender and the pain spread to the right shoulder. He could not use an artificial limb and rarely the crutches. But he hated remaining in the house and liked in all weathers to be driven in an open carriage, especially on Sundays and holidays. Then he preferred to be taken where he could watch the crowds.

He still desired to get married and return to Harrar, but he would not risk the criticism of a bourgeois girl. He would take someone from an orphanage, "of irreproachable family and education," or else a Catholic woman of the noble Abyssinian race. He would sometimes speak, not of his own adventures, but of the people and things he had seen. Sometimes he would jest, ridiculing everything, past, present, and future, the people he had known, and himself.

His pains spread and the right arm became paralysed. He was terribly bored with Roche, he suffered from sleeplessness and became very irritable. The doctor's sleeping-draughts were ineffective. One night, since he longed so ardently for sleep, his sister went out into the fields and gathered poppies with which she made an infusion. He drank this and relapsed for several days into a state of trance. With doors and windows tightly closed, all the lamps and candles burning, to the soft undertones of a tiny musical box, he repassed his life, evoked his memories of childhood, developed his intimate thoughts, showed his plans and projects for the future. Then they learnt that whilst at Harrar, he had heard of his growing literary fame in Paris, but he was glad that he had not continued the work of his youth because "c'était mal." After some days of this intoxication, hallucinations began. One night he tried to seize some vision which appeared in his room, and he even got out of bed to pursue it. His sister heard the sound of his fall and ran in to find him stretched naked and helpless on the carpet. Since I read of that fall I have never been able to finish *Aube* without a shudder.

After this Rimbaud decided that he would give up these comforting drugs and bear his pain and sleeplessness, rather than again speak his intimate thoughts.

His one desire was to return to Harrar, and to that end he thought it would be best to go back to Marseilles, where at least it was sunny and near the port to embark as soon as he was able.

The last journey from Roche to the South was terrible, but need not be recounted. Passing through Paris he had a momentary whim to stay there, but decided otherwise. In the cab which took him from the Gare du Nord to the Gare de Lyon he stared greedily through the window at the desolate Sunday streets, swept by a rainstorm. In the station the sight of an officer in uniform roused him for a moment to sarcastic gaiety,

but afterwards he relapsed into silent suffering. On the 24th August he entered the Hôpital de la Conception at Marseilles.

Though he was already dying, for the cancerous disease had become generalized, he clung to life for more than two months longer, and all the time his sister stayed with him and did all that she could to ease his torments.

By the end of October, but for his tenacious will to live, he would have been dead. It was necessary to give him injections of morphine to enable him to get a little sleep. Waking, he passed his life in a continual trance.

"He says strange things very sweetly, in a voice which would enchant me if it did not pierce my heart. They are dreams which he describes—though it is not by any means the same thing as when he had the fever. One would say, and I believe it is so, that he does it deliberately. As he was murmuring these things, the sister whispered to me, 'He has lost consciousness then?' But he heard and became quite flushed and said nothing more. But when the sister had gone he said to me, 'They think I am mad, and you, do you believe it?' No, I do not believe it, he is an almost immaterial being and his thought escapes in spite of himself."

At this time Isabelle Rimbaud was ignorant of the nature of her brother's poetry, and as this quotation is taken from a letter written by his bedside there should be no suspicion of literary coquetry.

He recognized everybody, but sometimes the memory of his existence at Harrar, to which he longed ardently to return, interposed itself in front of the real present. He calls his sister Djami, which was the name of his favourite native servant, and moves again among the bales and sacks of his warehouse, among the camels

and the richly harnessed mules, directing the caravan, hastening to reach their destination by the promised time.

About a fortnight before his death he consented to receive the rites of the Church. This fact has been given a retrospective significance by certain critics which, in the circumstances, it will hardly bear. The incident is related by the pious and impressionable sister who was nearly alone with him for those many dreadful months. After a priest had confessed him he said to his sister, "You are of the same blood as me, do you believe, tell me, do you believe?" She replied, "I believe; others wiser than myself have believed, and still believe." He said to her again, with bitterness, "Yes, they say that they believe, they pretend to be converted, but it is so that one will read what they write, it is a speculation." But his sister replied that they would gain more money by blaspheming. He wished to embrace her, to assure himself above all of her faith. Then he said, "You must prepare everything in the room, arrange everything; he is going to return with the sacraments. You will see, they are going to bring the candles and the lace-cloths; one must put white cloths everywhere. I am really very ill then!" His sister saw that he desired the sacraments keenly; he blasphemed no longer, but prayed. But the priest was not able to give him the communion. "*Arthur crachant beaucoup en ce moment et ne pouvant rien souffrir dans sa bouche, on a eu peur d'une profanation involontaire. Et lui, croyant qu'on l'oublie, est devenu triste; mais il n'est pas plaint.*" That was a fortnight before his death, but we are not told if his piety continued.

His last words were dictated in delirium to his sister on the eve of his death, and ask that he may be put on a ship bound for Suez. Next day, 10th November 1891, Rimbaud was dead.

PART II
THE POET

X

THE EARLY POEMS

ONE of the most suggestive remarks made about Rimbaud is that attributed to his friend the artist Forain, who said that he had created things perhaps above or outside literature. But this may be misleading. What is true is that no writer of the last half century has so widely extended the boundaries of literature. But that he remained within them (even, for the most part, within the limits implied in the French meaning of "littérature") will be obvious from the many quotations with which we shall embellish these pages. And the claim of his work to stand as literature beside that of Hugo, Vigny, and Musset is based on the fact that at its most esoteric it has an objective meaning which becomes obvious when we know something of Rimbaud's preoccupations.

It is true, however, that for a time he was filled with the ambition to raise literature above its natural capabilities. He desired that poetry should no longer sing of great deeds, but should be "in advance."

The earlier poems are chiefly interesting for the information they give us about his intellectual development. They show the ease and speed with which he assimilated his reading, and indicate that he could easily have acquired that virtuosity which sustains the great poet in his flights from peak to peak. This, however, is a licence he definitely renounced. He is himself when he is interested, not in traditionally poetic emotions, but in those of his own mind. And he took this step, which led him so far from the ancient themes, at the age of

fifteen, when he wrote *Sensation*, at least a year before he founded a poetic technique on these conditions.

“La première étude de l’homme qui veut être poète est sa propre connaissance, entière. Il cherche son âme, il l’inspecte, il la tente, l’apprend. Dès qu’il la sait, il la doit cultiver. . . .”

For a long time he did not know his own mind; he knew that it was irked by something, and he looked into it and found what he thought the cause of its discomfort—social injustice, religious superstition, bourgeois prejudices, prosaic poetry. With extraordinary vigour and bravery he set himself to extract the very roots of these poisonous growths. Many of his poems are arsenical for this reason.

His work falls naturally into three kinds—revolts, visions, and valedictions, as they appear in the order of time, though in the mental order we can only say that his revolt was constant. His vision was coincident with his revolt, being the cause of it, but intermittently perceived; his written work is an excuse for postponing the valediction which his revolt and his vision necessitate—an excuse which, after *Une Saison en Enfer*, he could no longer justify.

He wanted poetry to be something more than life, to be in advance of life—to rhyme poetic or extraordinary experience, not the commonplaces of existence. But it must be based on experience, and so Rimbaud’s poetry is always a part of his life, and it is his life which was originally extraordinary. Unlike the poets who soar from a comfortable security, he flung himself headlong; unlike those who delude themselves with their visions, he perceived that even as closely as he drew his poetry to his soul it remained an external and frivolous thing, and so abandoned it.

I admit that I find the merely literary poems more than tolerable. They are obviously derivative and show

the successive influences of Hugo, Gautier, Banville, Musset, Leconte de Lisle, and, lastly, Baudelaire, but in each of them will be found something of Rimbaud's self in a rapidly increasing proportion.

The noble paganism of *Soleil et Chair* provides the first unmistakable signs of his plastic genius. It is strong and simple, sensuous and passionate. The fourth part in particular, describing a procession of the divinities, shows with what intensity he realized the vague figures of his rhetoric classes.

Entre le laurier rose et le lotus jaseur
Glisse amoureusement le grand Cygne rêveur,
Embrassant la Lédà des blancheurs de son aile. . . .

Suddenly much more personal is the poem in which he reveals his own newly discovered Rousseauism in the symbol of *Ophélia*.

O pâle Ophélia, belle comme la neige,
Oui, tu mourus, enfant, par un fleuve emporté ! . . .
C'est que le vent tombant de grands monts de Norwège
T'avait parlé tout bas de l'âpre liberté.

He is no longer content with literary imagery, but draws on his own observation:

Elle éveille parfois, dans un aulne qui dort,
Quelque nid d'où s'échappe un petit frisson d'aile.

His sophistication was already without limits, and he followed up the reverie of *Ophélia*, an exercise for his form-master, with the corrosive disgust of the *Châtiment de Tartuffe*.

Tissonant, tissonant son cœur amoureux sous
Sa chaste robe noire.

With what mastery he strips the decencies from hypocrisy in the last line—

—Peuh ! Tartuffe était nu du haut jusques en bas.

I like the gay lover of *Comédie en Trois Baisers* and *Ce qui retient Nina*, though the latter is a more solid achievement. He condenses amazingly definite pictures into the slender stanzas in which it is written:

Nous regagnerions le village
 Au ciel mi-noir,
 Et ça sentirait le laitage
 Dans l'air du soir.

Or this of the young lovers going home along the country road:

Flânant comme un troupeau qui broute
 Tout alentour.

A La Musique is another piece in which there is no faltering, either in its satiric or intimate part. The citizens of Charleville used to be regaled once a week by the music of a military band and Rimbaud, like a skeleton at the feast, because he did not care for patriotic tunes, vented his spleen on the complacent backs of

Tous les bourgeois poussifs qu'étranglent les chaleurs.

Probably none of them shivered when the sulky looking schoolboy turned his eyes on them, those eyes which he used with such admirable effect, but if ridicule could have chilled them they would have done so. The sardonic humour of this stanza, its precise description, and its technical surety are admirable.

Le long de gazons verts ricanent le voyous,
 Et, rendus amoureux par le chant des trombones,
 Très naïfs et fumant des roses, les pioupious
 Caressent les bébés pour enjôler les bonnes.

The feverish desires of adolescence have rarely been given final expression in literature because, by the time the writer deals with them he is too far off to be in sympathy with them. Rimbaud, with his precocious ability, was on the spot, as it were, and he has given

definitive form to a vulgar and frivolous, but none the less universal and undeniable, moment of life.

Moi, je suis, débraillé comme un étudiant,
 Sous les marronniers verts les alertes fillettes.
 Elles le savent bien et tournent en riant
 Vers moi leurs yeux tout pleins de choses indiscrettes.

Je ne dis pas un mot ; je regarde toujours
 La chair de leur col blanc brodé de mèches folles ;
 Je suis, sous leur corsage et les frêles atours,
 Le dos divin après la courbe des épaules.

Je cherche la bottine et je vais jusqu'aux bas ;
 Je reconstruis le corps, brûlé de belles fièvres.
 Elles me trouvent drôle et se parlent tout bas.
 Et je sens des baisers qui me viennent aux lèvres.

The physiology of maidenhood had fewer secrets for him than its psychology. But one begins to understand his distaste for Musset.

But with that immense versatility that is not the least remarkable feature of his genius his next poem was the Republican-idealist sonnet which heralded his escape to Paris and humiliating sojourn in the lock-up.

Morts de quatre-vingt-douze et de quatre-vingt-treize
 Qui, pâles du baiser fort de la liberté, . . .
 Hommes extasiés et grands dans la tourmente,
 Vous dont les cœurs sautaient d'amour sous les haillons, . . .
 Vous dont le sang lavait toute grandeur salie,
 Morts de Valmy, morts de Fleurus, morts d'Italie,
 O million de Christs aux yeux sombres et doux,
 Nous vous laissions dormir avec la République,
 Nous, courbés sous les rois comme sous une trique :
 —Messieurs de Cassagnac nous reparlent de vous !

This is a poem which would excite admiration even in a volume of Hugo. When one thinks that there was this force of idealization in the boy who was treated like a criminal, it is not strange that he should quickly despise those who pretended to hold those ideals. The

last line of the sonnet is a blast of irony—the Cassagnacs were political journalists—and clears it of the mists of sentiment which might at first seem to obscure it. On a manuscript copy of the poem he noted with a flourish, “Fait à Mazas.”

The poems which he wrote during his periods of freedom between August and November are all occasional pieces bearing on events or emotions of his wanderings. They are more closely himself than his early poems, delicious, familiar, and even gay, as so little else in his work is. Such is the memory of the evening he stopped in Charleroi, at the Cabaret Vert, and stretched his tired legs under the table:

Et ce fut adorable
 Quand la fille aux tétons énormes, aux yeux vifs,
 —Celle-là, ce n'est pas un baiser qui l'épeure! —
 Rieuse, m'apporta des tartines de beurre,
 Du jambon tiède dans un plat colorié,
 Du jambon rose et blanc parfumé d'une gousse
 D'ail, et m'emplit la chope immense avec sa mousse
 Que dorait un rayon de soleil arriéré.

That is art for the senses with a satisfaction like that of the Flemish masters of painting. *La Maline* is a sonnet in the same manner; the longer poem, *Les Effarés*, is still more admirable in its pictorial quality, showing the poor children with whom Rimbaud's hunger made him identify himself, clustering round the skylight of a bakery:

A genoux, cinq petits—misère!—
 Regardent le Boulanger faire
 Le lourd pain blond.

The simplicity of sound and colour in the last line!

Ils écoutent le bon pain cuire.
 Le Boulanger au gras sourire
 Grogne un vieil air.

And again:

Quand, sous les poutres enfumées,
Chantent les croûtes parfumées
Et les grillons,

Que ce trou chaud souffle la vie,
Ils ont leur âme si ravie
Sous leurs haillons . . .

Like puppies, are they not?

Collant leurs petits museaux roses
Au treillage, grognant des choses
Entre les trous,

Tout bêtes, faisant leur prières
Et repliés vers ces lumières
Du ciel rouvert,

Si fort, qu'ils crèvent leurs culotte
Et que leur chemise tremblote
Au vent d'hiver.

Such a poem does not leave any doubt as to Rimbaud's descriptive faculty, if he had cared to develop it in the traditional manner. The satirist takes up the pen another time to chastise the exiled Napoleon:

Il s'était dit : Je vais souffler la Liberté,
Bien délicatement, ainsi qu'une bougie . . .

Rimbaud's satire has a sting in it, even when, as in *Le Mal*, it is most general. In that poem he attacks the monarchy, God, and society, the war-makers. Just before writing it he had found, or imagined he found, a young soldier dead by the side of a little stream and this incident moved him to the fine sonnet called *Le Dormeur du Val*. It accounts for the rage with which he turns on the war-makers—the sentiment in the fifth and sixth lines of the poem in question. But indeed the whole of

the poem is admirable from the spitting machine-guns in the first line

Tandis que les crachats rouges de la mitraille . . .

to the bereaved women of the last, who worship a greedy God,

Et pleurant sous leur vieux bonnet noir
Lui donnent un gros sous lié dans leur mouchoir.

But for simple poetry we should without a doubt prefer *La Bohème*, the poem of the youthful vagabond free of the roads in

Ces bon soirs de septembre où je sentais des gouttes
De rosée à mon front comme un vin de vigueur.

Le Buffet, though less personal—it is strongly influenced by Baudelaire—is hardly less pleasing. It is, however, in *Oraison du Soir* that he reaches the culmination of his early powers. This poem, which in its notation of the impalpable anticipates *Les Chercheuses de Poux*, is, like its successor, hardly fitted for drawing-room recitation. The loss is to the drawing-rooms. It evokes the experience of drinking a great number of *chopes* of that blond light beer of the country, which entrances rather than intoxicates. It opens with an unexpected stroke of humour:

Je vis assis, tel qu'un Ange aux mains d'un barbier
under a sky that is not clouded but, as he perfectly expresses it,

gros d'impalpables voilures.

Then the tingling of a thousand faintly excited nerves fills him with unseizable suggestions, or again a flood of lassitude sweeps over him.

Puis par instants mon cœur tendre est comme un aubier
Qu'ensanglante l'or jeune et sombre des coulures.

It is obviously impossible to commentate each poem, but each, if not perfect, has a great deal in it to merit attention. For his work is a continual confession, and he grew too rapidly to repeat himself. Enough has been quoted, however, to permit the generalization that Rimbaud, had he died at the end of this year 1870, at the age of sixteen and two months, would still have deserved a place in the anthologies. He had shown himself to have a command of verse which enabled him to express a broad idea or a private sensation. Such a poem as *Les Effarés* is obviously better suited to influence the young mind than Sully-Prudhomme's *Vase Brisé* or Mrs. Hemans' *Blind Boy*, both of which have been and perhaps are still part of the poetic repertory of schools, calculated to alienate a lusty child for ever from the thought of poetry. Rimbaud's poem is not only superior in its humanity, but its language is intensely more alive. The last consideration is one which affects our subject very closely. It was in part due to the easy mastery with which he dominated the language, making it answer to the most elusive of his desires, that he became contemptuous of all the other poets to whom rhetoric was indispensable. French poetry has never, since the end of the Renaissance, quite bridged the distinction between noble and familiar poetry. Baudelaire is often an exception, and though he is hampered by his form he has been the inspiring example of the last fifty years. Verlaine, too, succeeded, sometimes only too well, and each in a lesser degree Corbière and P. J. Toulet. The hosts of contemporary *fantaisistes* are often charming, but their effects are rarely successful unless they are frankly gay. The literary poets are capable of an art both elegant and refined, and there is at least one poet alive who draws a most lofty tone from abstruse philosophic speculations. But in the early Rimbaud there was a poet who could touch the most

vulgar aspect of life and raise it to the intensity of poetry by its mere contact with his own personality. Many modern poets have set themselves to express such familiar and contemporary aspects of life (we need only refer to the gifted author of *La Vie Unanime*), but some have stretched the legs of that noble war-horse the Alexandrine and muffled its hoofs of rhyme, till one wonders if the resultant animal has gained by adaptability what it has lost in symmetry. Rimbaud broke it in and rode it like a cowboy and then, and only then, feeling the desire for wings, he cut its throat. And, when he could not fly, he walked in the keen sharp steps of prose. There are no novel theories to be drawn from his example, but the classic one of saying as much as possible in, it is a matter of elementary politeness, the fewest possible words.

XI

REVOLTS

Des petites enfants étouffent des malédictions le long des rivières.

THIS phrase recalls the boy Rimbaud very vividly to the mind. It is taken from the prose poem headed significantly *Dimanche*, for it was on Sundays that his mother's discipline fell on him with most severity, and religion as she used it was the most powerful instrument of his restraint.

Il craignait les blafards dimanches de décembre,
Où, pommadé, sur un guéridon d'acajou
Il lisait une Bible à la trance vert-chou.

One can see the wretched boy in that early photograph we have described, washed and starched and with a look of fear in his eyes. So it was that when he found himself free of this tyranny and needed no longer to stifle his curses, he turned on religion with a savagery which repaid a long old debt. He had read Proudhon, Saint-Simon, and other such socialist philosophers, so that naturally

Il n'aimait pas Dieu, mais les hommes qu'au soir fauve,
Noirs, en blouse, il voyait rentrait dans le faubourg,

but his original impulse was unreasoned, like that of a coiled-up spring. It is in the poems written between his second failure to live in Paris and the meeting with Verlaine that revolt is the predominant theme. As we have pointed out, this period, roughly the summer of 1871, was an extremely trying one for him, and his irritation found relief in this destruction.

Mes petites amoureuses and *Les Pauvres à l'Eglise* are both poems of circumstance, the moulds of clay in which the more abstract passion of *Les Sœurs de Charité* and *Les Premières Communions* was fired. For the first of these is a poem of hate, the short lines snap with a maniac's fury.

Vos omoplates se déboîtent
O mes amours !
Une étoile à vos reins qui boitent,
Tournez vos tours !

Est-ce pourtant pour ces éclanches
Que j'ai rimé ?
Je voudrais vous casser les hanches,
D'avoir aimé !

But by the time he writes *Les Sœurs de Charité* he has realized that his wound lies deeper than this disgust and that the world has hurt him with a passive instrument.

Aveugle irréveillé aux immenses prunelles . . .

he calls woman, and deplores that it is she who reposes on the strength of man; in her he finds no tranquillity. Neither can he find rest in the arms of Poetry or Philosophy, a sedentary passion could never hold him, who was

Sans cesse altéré des splendeurs et des calmes . . .
Il porte à la nature en fleur son front saignant.

The latter line holds the remedy which he knew to be the only one for his malady, for the restlessness which made the Relative, in thought as in life, a desert to his feet:

Il sent marcher sur lui d'atroces solitudes.
Alors et toujours beau, sans dégoût du cercueil,
Qu'il croie aux vastes fins, Rêves ou Promenades
Immenses à travers les nuits de Vérité,
Et t'appelle en son âme et ses membres malades,
O Mort mystérieuse, O sœur de charité !

This magnificent eloquence might have satisfied half a dozen poets not only of talent, but of genius. Not so Rimbaud, for him it was too commonplace. He had to create out of the Unknown! And the momentary vision of the absolute repose of Death was repugnant to his pride of power.

Les Pauvres à l'Eglise is typically the poem of the rebel against God and the rich, of the traditional revolutionary,

Aux femmes, c'est bien bon de faire des bancs lisses
Après les dix jours noirs où Dieu les fait souffrir!

and against the bourgeois who teach their children to ignore the wretched people their religion bids them cherish,

Ces effarés y sont et ces épileptiques,
Dont on se détournait hier aux carrefours.

The poor themselves, who are supposed to be the reservoirs of a pure and beautiful faith, are painted with their odorous ugliness and blind material servility of worship:

Comme un parfum de pain humant l'odeur de cire,
Heureux, humiliés comme des chiens battus . . .

Far above this wretched scene the object of their prayers dreams unheedingly. The farce draws to its climax:

Et l'oraison fleurit d'expressions choisies,
Et les mysticités prennent de tons prenants.

In vigour of description and piquant satirical observation this shows him at his best. He has to a great extent discontinued the use of technical terms, that too-obvious searching of dictionaries which mars *Les Aïeux*, for instance; he is content with a rustic cudgel, but how cleanly he applies it.

Les Premières Communions, which is, after *Bateau Ivre*, the most remarkable of his longer poems, opens in the

same strong sarcastic manner, with a description of the church, the priest, and the children who are being prepared for their First Communion. But though it starts like that, it becomes a much deeper poem than the former, following the mystical erotic emotions to a philosophical end. It pretends to be about a little girl whom the priest had remarked as exceptionally pious, prophesying that on the great day

Dieu fera sur ce front neiger ses bénitiers,

but we may safely say that this is a personal reference, for Rimbaud himself was thus distinguished at the time of his First Communion. Delahaye attributes a recrudescence of that three-year-old mysticism to a crisis of sensuality, and certainly as we read we feel sure that it is a subjective poem, sprung from the same root as *Mes petites amoureuses* and *Les Sœurs de Charité*.

On the eve of the great day the child becomes ill, her nervous excitation sets up a pathological condition in which she experienced the mystic's surrender to the Divine Bridegroom. He sees in this exaltation a masochism, a morbid taste for pain and suffering which dulls the clarity of the pagan adoration of beauty.

Adonai ! . . . Dans les terminaisons latines,
Des cieux moirés de vert baignent les Fronts vermeils
Et, tachés du sang pur des celestes poitrines,
De grands linges neigeux tombent sur les soleils !

Pour ses virginités présentes et futures
Elle mord aux fraîcheurs de ta Rémission,
Mais plus que les lys d'eau, plus que les confitures,
Tes pardons sont glacés, O Reine de Sion !

Then the mystic ecstasy is broken and the Virgin becomes only a figure in a devotional book:

Et vient la pauvreté des images que cuivre
L'ennui,

expresses admirably the contrast between the two levels which Rimbaud distinguished in the psychology of perception, and to the higher of which he tried permanently to hoist himself.

But the little mystic, this schoolgirl Saint Theresa, is assailed by

Des curiosités vaguement impudiques

and, in spite of her efforts to regain the moment of communion,

Prolonger les éclairs suprêmes de tendresse

she falls feverishly asleep.

When she awakes it is midnight and she feels herself too weak to support a return of the divine passion, desiring above all darkness and the fresh air of night,

De la nuit, Vierge-Mère impalpable, qui baigne
Tous les jeunes émois de ses silences gris ;
Elle eût soif de la nuit forte où le cœur qui saigne
Ecoule sans témoin sa révolte sans cris.

She takes a candle and goes down into the backyard of the house, and there passes her night of holy meditation.

To understand the concluding passages of this poem and to see the steady tenacity of Rimbaud's intellectual development we must go back about a year and read *Soleil et Chair*. There we find the accusation of ugliness against the modern world, which Gautier, Banville, and Baudelaire in *J'aime le souvenir de ces époques nues* had taught him. He attributed this to man's subjection to a moral law which made the body shameful, but he had not then perceived that the Christian emphasis on the evil of this life and its rectification in the next was the cause of present vileness. Now he is perfectly explicit,

O sales fous
Dont le travail divin déforme encore les mondes.

In the earlier poem he wrote of the squalor of lives spent in the fear of death and shame:

Il a rabougri, comme une idole au feu,
 Son corps olympien aux servitudes sales !
 Oui, même après la mort, dans les squelettes pâles
 Il veut vivre, insultant la première beauté !
 Et l'idole où tu mis tant de virginité,
 Où tu divinisas notre argile, la Femme,
 Afin que l'homme pût éclairer sa pauvre âme
 Et monter lentement, dans un immense amour,
 De la prison terrestre à la beauté du jour,
 La Femme ne sait plus même être courtisane !

When his little communicant recovers from her hysterics she is pitifully aware that the divine kiss, by inflicting her with a sense of sin and shame, has stricken her with that terrible malady of the conscience which is the legacy of Judæo-Christian ethics :

Et moi, je suis malade : oh ! je veux qu'on me couche
 Parmi les Morts des eaux nocturnes abreuvés !

The righteous passions of the flesh are denied to women and their whole being weakened with remorse,

Alors l'âme pourrie et l'âme désolée . . .

Rimbaud's vituperation does not stop at genteel blasphemies, but let us be content with a line which sums up the principal term of his indictment:

Christ ! O Christ, éternel *voleur des énergies* . . .

There we see him straining forward towards the idea of the freedom to be powerful; Religion, with its taboos and feasts of purification and other savageries, hampered him enough, but it was easy for him to discard it. He had done so long ago, in *Les Pauvres à l'Eglise* for instance. But it had done him a deeper wrong by depriving him of the companionship of women, whom

he thought had sunk deeper into its mesh. None the less, though the poem bears this objective reading, it is obvious that he himself had experienced, and was perhaps at the time of writing again threatened with, the mystical entrancement. The intensity of disgust which breathes in some of the lines is only explicable if we suppose that Rimbaud himself had once surrendered to this divine prostitution. The thought of such a recurrence now wounded his egotistic pride.

There was yet one more cry of revolt. He had seen that neither Love, God, nor Society, as they are at present understood, embodied his idea. But so far he had taken his stand on a footing common to the world, he had been a reformer, attempting to bring the world nearer to an idea of justice which it had itself, through certain outstanding figures, postulated. He had ardently desired a Christian-Socialist Utopia for the rest of the world, but seeing that the words Love and Justice were used simply as watch-dogs set at the front and back doors of society to curtail exit in certain directions, and that they might be bribed with a sop, he was disgusted. For that reason he refused to take advantage of conventional standards of right and wrong, tribal survivals which were quite obviously beneath the dignity of a man, let alone a leader of humanity. It is from this isolation that he apostrophizes the Righteous Man,

Juste! plus bête et plus dégoûtant que les lices !

Je suis celui qui souffre et qui c'est révolté.

(*L'Homme Juste.*)

From this time on till the crisis in June of the next year he seems to lose the sense of irony. He conceives himself as a passionate, suffering anti-Christ.

Socrates et Jésus, saints et justes, dégoût !

Respectez le Maudit suprême aux nuits sanglantes.

The poem breaks off with the recognition of an authority which the rebel cannot challenge:

L'Ordre, eternal veilleur, rame aux cieux lumineux
Et de sa drague en feu laisse filer les astres !

As these poems show, his intense aspiration has broken down the ladder of external idealism. There was nothing for him to do but to seek within himself the vision of beatitude and he entered the dangerous path of godless mysticism.

XII

VISIONS

Ainsi je travaille à me faire voyant.

IT was in the winter of 1870-71, a winter of defeat and idleness, that Rimbaud, whilst awaiting an opportunity to return to Paris, then besieged, meditated the technical reforms which opened up such long philosophical perspectives. In the small town in which he lived his exploits could not have passed unnoticed, and he was, he more or less tacitly agreed, on his mettle. The rebel is the only person who cannot retire on his savings, and Rimbaud wanted to be the one and do the other. But he was at the top of an inclined plane; the habit of contradiction grew as he indulged it, as his pride forced him to. Whatever merits were conceded him, he must go one higher or one lower. And so Hugo was *trop cabochard*, Musset *abominable*, Racine *le divin Sot*, and Baudelaire the only true poet, a god. But in that last admiration he reached an apex, and the only direction thenceforward was down, down to the depths of his confession: "J'aimais . . . la littérature démodée, latin d'église, livres érotiques sans orthographe, romans de nos aïeules, contes de fées, petits livres de l'enfance, opéras vieux, refrains niais; rythmes naïfs."

The trajectory we have traced is not a fanciful one. It is of the utmost significance that the above quotation is taken quite from the beginning of his account of the technical experiment he called *Alchimie du Verbe*; it began with a revulsion. But we shall be inexact if we attribute his disdain entirely, or even principally, to the literary snobbishness he unwittingly encouraged in his descendants. It was the cry of an organism in pain, or

like that inelegant gesture which follows repletion. He was stuffed with the classics, stuffed with the philosophers, with the Romantics, the Parnassians, and he felt an ardent desire to disembarass himself of the whole lot. His literary genius was martyred on the rack of secondary education.

Helvétius, with whom he came in contact at this time, was a distinct influence. He forced on him the conception of the mind as the product of the senses, which, to one of such sensual acuity as Rimbaud, gave immense confidence. Even memory, Helvétius demonstrated, is simply a continuation of sensation, weakened but conserved, so that the mind, whether in itself it be material or not, is completely the product of the nervous sensibility. When we remember this, such sentences as Rimbaud's injunction "La mémoire et les sens ne seront que la nourriture de ton impulsion créatrice" do not appear so gnomic as they might at first sight.

One of the examples chosen by Helvétius to illustrate his theory is the low mentality of animals such as the horse. The extremities of these creatures, their hoofs, are covered with insensitive horn, and if we consider how much knowledge we owe to the delicacy of our hands, the reasoning of Helvétius appears most plausible. This, I imagine, was the starting-point of Rimbaud's reasoning, if so instant a step may be called reasoning: "Let us refine our fingers, that is *all* our points of contact with the external world, and our minds will become proportionately superior to those of ordinary men, as theirs are now to horses." His initial delicacy of sense was extreme, as we may see in such poems as *Sensation* or *Les Poètes de Sept Ans*.

It was in the May of this year that he wrote: "The poet makes himself a seer by a long, immense, and reasoned derangement of all the senses." So sharp was his decision to abandon the tradition of rhymed prose that he bids his correspondent destroy all the poems "I

was fool enough to send you after my stay at Douai"—that is, all those considered in the first chapter.

Since the mind is the product of the sensations a change in the perceptive apparatus would suffice to fashion another kind of mind. This is the explanation of Rimbaud's use of artificial means of stimulation. He sought to dupe the ordinary sensory system which imprisons us in our present nature. He induced this change most frequently by simple concentration, in which he showed an inhuman endurance. Even when he had stopped writing, wishing to study a foreign language, he was known to pass twenty-four hours shut in a closet without intermission even for food or drink.

Whilst his conception of the poet's rôle assumed such an immense significance, the technique of his art changed with comparative slowness. The tendency to press sensation into his lines was very fitting to his ambition, since his principal occupation would be to fix the perceptions as they flowed past in the half light of his contemplation. For this purpose the strong but supple descriptive power which we have already pointed out was an admirable beginning, but he soon found it far from swift enough. It is to Delahaye that we owe the information that in this summer of 1871 Rimbaud declared that description was the whole of literature. But he did not mean by this the formal description or imitation of plastic effects such as Gautier and the Parnassians practised. When we consider his age and the position of Baudelaire at the time we shall realize that he was already an aesthetic critic of no mean perception.

"The second romantics are very *visionary*: Théophile Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, Théodore de Banville. But to inspect the invisible and hear the unheard being another matter than to recapture the spirit of dead things, Baudelaire is the first *voyant*, king of poets, a *true god*. Still he lived in too artistic an environment,

and his form, which is so much praised, is paltry. The inventions of the unknown demand new forms."

Though he realized the insufficiency of the conventional technique, he could at present only modify it. He forced the classic Alexandrine to bear more closely the imprint of his feeling.

Et pour des visions écrasant son œil darne.

The first sustained and, in many ways, the greatest of his visions is *Bateau Ivre*, his most famous and deservedly popular poem. Written soon after he had reached the climax of revolt which has just been described, it is the poem of the momentary freedom his spirit enjoyed, drifting from end to end of his trance-world until ancient uncontrollable currents seized it and dragged it back to harbour. Such a vicarious wish-fulfilment is not characteristic of Rimbaud, but his yearning for exotic landscape is not a fictitious thing. It is marked in his earliest and his last writings, long after he had discarded literature, and was one of the principal dominating influences of his life.

For the starting-point of this poem we must go yet again to Baudelaire. The last lines of *Le Voyage* might stand as epigraph to *Bateau Ivre*.

Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe ?
Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du *nouveau* !

This conception of the Unknown is the starting-point of Rimbaud's mad voyage. It is the vastest of the negative immensities all of which exercise a sometimes abused fascination over him—*inouï*, *infini*, *insensible*, *incroyable*. They reveal the strain on even his marvellous invention, in this poem strained to the uttermost to create out of books of adventure, science, travel, newspapers, and his own sensuous perceptions, a phantasmagoric universe.

He had not yet seen the sea, and he uses it as a symbol of the Unknown, filling it with fancies which are the fruit of a sensibility methodically exasperated. Abandoned to the waves, this boat, his spirit, drifts into the Unknown, is permeated by it, and at last, in the flood of stimulants and dissipations, is deprived of every means of control.

Et, dès lors je me suis baigné dans le poème
De la mer infusé d'astres et lactescent,
Dévorant les azurs verts où, flottaison blême
Et ravie, un noyé pensif, parfois descend.

And I have since, bathed in the poem Sea
Milky with the infusion of the stars,
Devoured its glaucous spaces where, pale wreck,
A drowned man rapt and pensive sometimes falls.

Then comes that series of exotic scenes which symbolizes his effort towards a new and complete experience, and his last exhaustion. The whole of his desire, made concrete in sensuous imagery and expressive sound, in the varied but unfailing vigour of his lines, is swept along in the emotional rhythm which dominated his life:

J'ai suivi, des mois pleins, pareille aux vacheries
Hystériques, la houle à l'assaut des récifs,
Sans songer que les pieds lumineux des Maries
Pussent forcer le mufle aux Océans poussifs.

J'ai heurté, savez-vous? d'incroyables Florides
Mêlant aux fleurs des yeux de panthères aux peaux
D'hommes, des arcs-en-ciel tendus comme des brides
Sous l'horizon des mers, à de glauques troupeaux.

J'ai vu fermenter les marais, énormes nasses
Où pourrit dans les joncs tout un Léviathan,
Des écroulements d'eaux aux milieu des bonaces
Et les lointains vers les gouffres cataractant !

Glaciers, soleils d'argent, flots nacreux, cieux de braises,
 Echouages hideux au fond des golfes bruns
 Où les serpents géants dévorés des panaises
 Choient des arbres tordus avec de noirs parfums !

The feverishness of the invention appears in certain stanzas, though the splendid sonority of the diction bridges these momentary gaps, and none other of his regular poems is so rich in examples of that intensity of vision which, for instance, brings the dawn whitely before one's eyes,

L'aube exaltée ainsi qu'un peuple de colombes,
 and by means apparently so remote. That gentleness, too, which is so disconcerting before one has realized that the poet's sudden brutalities are the reflexes of a branded prisoner, transpires through such a stanza as:

J'aurais voulu montrer aux enfants ces dorades
 Du flot bleu, ces poissons d'or, ces poissons chantants.
 Des écumes de fleurs ont béni mes dérades,
 Et d'ineffables vents m'ont ailé par instants.

I would have shown to children those gold fish
 Of the blue wave, those golden, singing fish.
 The foam in flowers has blessed my goings-out
 And sometimes ineffable breezes winged me.

Then, recoiling from the immensity he has created, the poet is aware of his violation and degradation, and in spite of his pride in his achievement, his thoughts turn back towards the familiar landscapes. That is how we would interpret these stanzas:

Or, moi, bateau perdu sous les cheveux des anses,
 Jeté par l'ouragan dans l'éther sans oiseau,
 Moi dont les Monitors et les voiliers des Hanses
 N'auraient pas repêché la carcasse ivre d'eau,

Libre, fumant, monté de brumes violettes,
 Moi qui trouais le ciel rougeoyant comme un mur
 Qui porte, confiture exquise aux bons poètes,
 Des lichens de soleil et des morves d'azur. . . .

Moi qui tremblais, sentant geindre à cinquante lieues
 Le rut des Béhémots et des Maelstroms épais,
 Fileur éternel des immobilités bleues,
 Je regrette l'Europe aux anciens parapets.

In the remotest and most heavenly regions which he has seen, does that strength linger, he wonders, which is the object of his unceasing motion?

J'ai vu des archipels sidéraux ! et des îles
 Dont les cieux délirants sont ouverts au vogueur :
 Est-ce en ces nuits sans fond que tu dors et t'exiles,
 Million d'oiseaux d'or, ô future Vigueur ?

It is these golden birds which flit through the umbrage of the poems in prose, which he shortly wrote, the tears on their wings frozen in that ardent winter of the young, disdainful sage. Slowly or suddenly the blonde and efflorescent loveliness of this poem, which is, in spite of its dawn-like moments, lush and tropical, gave way before the polar clarity and crystal-like arrangement of the *Illuminations*. And it is not romantically that we have spoken of those frozen tears, for in the next stanza he exposes his revulsion from the altruism of his young enthusiasms,

Mais vrai, j'ai trop pleuré. Les aubes sont navrantes,
 Toute lune est atroce et tout soleil amer.
 L'âcre amour ma a gonflé de torpeurs enivrantes.
 Oh ! que ma quille éclate ! Oh ! que j'aille à la mer !

In the last stanzas his unappeased nostalgia turns back, as all his life he turned back, to the brief unconsciousness of his childhood, when, ambitionless, he floated a paper boat down a muddy gutter of Charleville.

Si je désire un eau d'Europe, c'est la flache
 Noire et froide où vers le crépuscule embaumé
 Un enfant accroupi, plein de tristesse, lâche
 Un bateau frêle comme un papillon de mai.

After *Bateau Ivre* he wrote only three poems in what

may justly be called regular verse. It shows to what depths of submission the artist in Rimbaud might be driven by Rimbaud the doctrinaire, that even these he despised and to the last, *Les Corbeaux*, meted out ignominious treatment. What madness made him abandon *Les Chercheuses de Poux*? He deigns to mention only the sonnet *Voyelles*, and that not for its magnificent imagery, but for the quite insignificant colouration he gave the vowels.¹ It shows us that we have not overestimated the importance of his intellectual and moral preoccupations, even though the lover of beauty may consider it a waste of time. But unadulterated aesthetic enjoyment is not only very rare, after infancy, it is not more desirable than sugar-icing. The percentage of artist in a poet is generally very high, but it is always in the great poets subordinated to a pre-occupation of the sensibility which is outside the aesthetic. So as our taste matures we cast off the delights of sound and sweetness and "feed on that which to weak tastes seems tough."

The strongest poems, we shall find, are those in which

¹ The passing reference to the famous sonnet in *Une Saison en Enfer* shows that he did not intend it to be made a system—he does not use it as such himself. He said of it: "I believed that I saw, sometimes I believed that I felt, in that way, and I said so and narrated it, because I found it as interesting as anything else."

"A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu, voyelles
Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes."

The phenomenon is not unknown to medicine, nor is it necessarily confined to cases of hallucination. Quite simple people will often say, "What colour does that smell, and that musical note, remind you of?" Literary critics will compare the sonnet *Correspondences* of Baudelaire, in whom Rimbaud was absorbed at this time, wherein there is the line

"Les parfums, les couleurs, et les sons se répondent."

One need not, unless one likes, give a fig for the theory of hallucination. He may have copied the colours from the illustrations to a child's A.B.C. But the feeling in the poem is unmistakable.

the aesthetic make-up (rhythm, imagery, colour, rhyme) is not more pronounced than the emotion which gives it life. There are many poems almost wholly made of pleasing colours and images built into a structure of rhyme and metre through which the emotion scampers like a mouse in the Crystal Palace. That is why a poem, pleasing in all its external characteristics, may be quite repulsive.

Prends l'éloquence et lui tord le cou

Verlaine said in a poem which, written in 1874 (though published much later), may well have preserved the doctrine of Rimbaud. *Les Chercheuses de Poux*, however, is still traditional in its technique and so thorough is the poet's absorption in his subject that it remains the most completely finished of his poems in verse, and in the sureness of diction with which he translates these elusive sensations he shows himself no apprentice but a master.

Elles assoient l'enfant auprès d'une croisée
Grande ouverte où l'air bleu baigne un fouillis de fleurs
Et dans ses lourds cheveux où tombe la rosée,
Promenant leur doigts fins, terribles et charmeurs.

Il écoute chanter leurs haleines craintives
Qui fleurent de longs miels végétaux et rosés
Et qu'interrompt parfois un sifflement, salives
Reprises sur la lèvre ou desirs de baisers.

Voyelles is found to suffer from the amplification imposed by the sonnet form. This notation of hallucinatory effects is evidently the germ of the manner of some of the prose *Illuminations*, e.g., *Barbare*:

U, cycles, vibrations divins des mers virides,
Paix des pâtis semés d'animaux, paix des rides
Que l'alchimie imprime aux grands fronts studieux;
O, suprême clairon plein de strideurs étranges,
Silences traversés des Mondes et des Anges . . .

XIII

BEYOND THE GRAND MANNER

THE sonorous and cosmic vision of *Voyelles* is succeeded by poems of a very different music, one which, though it does not sweep the imagination off its feet, carries deeper into the heart probably than anything else he wrote. *Les Corbeaux* is a patriotic poem, as Verlaine rightly calls it; it is a poem of defeat and the call of duty. Rimbaud's state of mind in April 1872 enabled him to identify himself with his country, still dismayed by the disastrous war. How descriptive of the wintry countryside and the desolation of war, of the soaring and sinking of the crows, their dispersal and black gathering, are these stanzas:

Seigneur, quand froide est la prairie,
Quand dans les hameaux abattus
Les longs angelus se sont tus
Sur la nature défleurie,
Faites s'abattre des grands cieux
Les chers corbeaux délicieux.

Armée étrange aux cris sévères, . . .
Les vents froids attaquent vos nids !
Vous, le long des fleuves jaunis,
Sur les routes aux vieux calvaires . . .
Dispersez vous, ralliez vous !

.
Laissez les fauvettes de mai
Pour ceux qu'au fond du bois enchaîne,
Dans l'herbe d'où l'on ne peut fuir,
La défaite sans avenir.

(he remembers the dead soldier of *Dormeur du Val*).

This is obviously the work of a great artist, one who draws his inspiration from common things, and whose feelings are fine enough to dispense with the bizarre, a stronger artist than the inspired rhetorician of *Paris se repeuple*:

Les vers, les vers livides
Ne gêneront plus ton souffle de progrès
Que les stryx n'éteignaient l'œil des Cariatides
Où des pleurs d'or astral tombaient des bleus degrés.

If Rimbaud enters the lists to challenge Hugo's magnificence of language it is with a weapon forged of his opponent's steel. He lacks the immense unshakeable weight of Hugo's work, and although *Paris se repeuple* is a sort of culmination of all the invective in *Les Châtiments*, we admire more the display of strength than the manner in which the strength is applied. His peculiar excellence as a poet is in expressiveness of language, and it is comparatively rarely that his poems move us by their eloquence or composition. He was a great master of language rather than a great maker of poems.

He continued the revitalization of the classic verse which the Romantics had begun, and in particular the saturated phrase of Baudelaire. It was not yet always free from rhetoric. This line, for instance,

Aveugle irréveillé aux immenses prunelles

has a more splendid but less permanent effect than Vigny's

Toujours ce compagnon dont le cœur n'est pas sur.

Far from being a suggestive art such as the symbolists aimed at, this regular verse of Rimbaud's is definitely expressive, and to attain that end he used all possible means of expression, not only those implicit in the

metre and rhyme scheme, but in the sonority of the line itself. Delahaye says that he learnt this last method from his study of the Latins, and commenting the line

Aux vingt gueules gueulant les cantiques pieux . . .

he says: "Ici Rimbaud va plus loin que Virgile, Catulle et Juvenal: non seulement il donne le tapage des chanteurs, mais il exprime encore, au moyen de la prononciation du dernier mot, le mépris haineux éprouvé par celui qui raconte."

That is treading on dangerous ground, to attempt thus to analyse the effect of a line of verse. There is for me as much expression of contempt in the sound of "vingt gueules gueulant" as in that of the last word. But without doubt Rimbaud is a master of the sarcastic line, for example, in the last stanza of *Les Pauvres à l'Eglise*, or in this:

Quelque enluminure où les Josephs et les Marthes
Tirent la langue avec un excessif amour . . .

In the same way the movement of the lines and the play of consonants emphasizes, in the brutal satire of *Les Assis*, the stumbling of the librarian in search of a book:

Et vous les écoutez cognant leurs têtes chauves
Aux murs sombres, plaquant et plaquant leurs pieds tors . . .

How striking in contrast is the equally appropriate weakness of this line descriptive of a child's paper boat:

Un bateau frêle comme un papillon de mai . . .

Bateau Ivre is full of such things.

Presqu'île ballotant sur mes bords les querelles
Et les fientes d'oiseaux clabaudes aux yeux blonds . . .

So far from being suggestive, this poetry is in danger of shutting out by the finality of his descriptions that

loophole for reverie which is the secret of the suggestive school of poetry. In this he is typical of his race, and it is in the intimacy of the sensations he describes that his rarity lies,

L'enfant se sent selon la lenteur des caresses,
Sourdre et mourir sans *cesse* un désir de pleurer.

Such being the nature of his art as he outgrew the literary influences of his schooldays, it is easy to see that the verse-form in itself meant nothing to him. It is not a means of subtilizing the sensations as it is with Baudelaire, but of rendering them palpable. For this purpose a less formally restricted medium would be even more suitable. He did not understand poetry as the language of great generalizations, nor would he have accepted the opinion that it is necessarily based on the commonplace. Did he not say that "Le poète définirait la quantité d'inconnu s'éveillant en son temps, dans l'âme universelle"? So he continued to probe the unknown with the result that his poetry drew farther and farther away from the inherited and traditional themes, which enable the poet to awaken through memory a rich symphony of undertones in the imagination of his reader. But whilst he did labour within the bounds of regular verse it would be hard to find another workman who could beat him in the variety and strength of his verse. And it may be remembered that this body of poetry was completed before the poet was seventeen. Precocity is not in itself a sign of poetic strength, but when it is considered that it is the output, and perhaps not the entire output, of less than two years, it is impossible to be anything less than astounded by the fecundity of his impulse.

XIV

LES ILLUMINATIONS: POEMS IN VERSE

Je disais adieu au monde dans d'espèces de romances.

LES ILLUMINATIONS is the title given by Verlaine to the manuscripts of prose and verse gleaned after Rimbaud's abandonment of literature. The poet himself had nothing to do with their publication, and many of the titles to individual pieces have been invented by editors. Their chronological arrangement is a problem of great difficulty, and the order at present adopted of separating the verse from the prose is misleading if it implies that the first of the prose poems was not written till after the last of those in verse. Since none of these manuscripts came from his home we have as possible extreme dates October 1871, when he went to Paris to meet Verlaine, till July 1873, when he returned home to complete *Une Saison en Enfer*. Some, of course, he might have taken with him to Paris—with *Bateau Ivre*, though that is unlikely. It is at least possible since Delahaye mentions that *Les Déserts de l'Amour* was written early in 1871. In any case, he was meditating a change of technique early in his visit as Verlaine records.

When a poet's development is so integral as was that of Rimbaud it is possible to rely a good deal on internal evidence. From the content of these pieces we should place them on both sides of the mental crisis which has been so frequently referred to as taking place about June 1872. Those with traces of the Messianic manner being obviously the earliest, the visionary or hallucinatory pieces were written during the latter part of his

stay in Paris. The definitely valedictory pieces (*Départ*, *Solde*, and several others) must have preluded, though at what distance it is impossible to say, the absolute farewell of *Une Saison en Enfer*. It is only possible to appreciate the full significance of the songs which follow by placing before or among them the prose poems which are like the footmarks leading tentatively to the brink of his inhuman ambition.

Les Corbeaux was written nearly six months later than *Voyelles*, and the unique return to regular verse was dictated probably by the taste of Emile Blémont, who printed it in his literary periodical, the *Renaissance*. But undoubtedly in the delicious rhythm of it we can detect the subtlety he had acquired during the technical experiments which occupied him in Paris. We may wonder where he acquired this new music, for sonorous and splendid as is the movement of his regular verse it is not musical in the sense to which an English ear is accustomed. This we shall only find in old French poetry, in the folk-songs (modern—popular songs), and most noticeably in modern poetry in the middle period of Verlaine. Verlaine undoubtedly had a refining influence on Rimbaud's verse, for though the latter was the more powerful writer, he was a less sophisticated craftsman. It was Verlaine who advised him to discontinue the use of technical terms and to restrain his vocabulary. It may well have been Verlaine's example, in *La Bonne Chanson* and the earlier poems of *Romances sans Paroles*, which led him to modulate his lines. His development was a comparatively slow and regular process of discarding all the literary devices which stood between himself and the object of his expression.

The traditional prosody laid down that a verse should consist of a certain number of *syllables* (there is no *foot* distinct from the syllable in French verse), and that there should be an interval in the interior of the verse

originally intended to enable the hearer to weigh both sense and rhythm, and to assist also the reciter. After Malherbe came it was obligatory to place this cesura between the sixth and seventh syllables of the verse. Here, then, is a type of Alexandrine—twelve syllables.

N'offrez rien au lecteur, que ce qui peut lui plaire.

For nearly two hundred years the French people submitted to this excessively rigorous discipline, and it is not till we come to Hugo that we find it seriously challenged. He thought himself a great fellow because he moved the caesura here and there and made use of *enjambement* (as Keats turned the closed couplet of the Augustans into a running couplet), and such he was, considering the dead weight of tradition he had to move against. Rimbaud, like all the other poets of the second half of the century, owes a deal to him, for this attack on the caesura was a great strategic victory. It was this rule which had confined the classic poetry to lines of ten and eight syllables when they forsook the Alexandrine, for they had been told that their cake had to be cut in halves. So all the uneven numbers and the melodies of hesitance were denied them.

La Rivière de Cassis roule ignorée
 En des vaux étranges :
 La voix de cent corbeaux l'accompagne, vraie
 Et bonne voix d'anges.
 Avec les grands mouvements des sapinaies
 Quand plusieurs vents plongent.

The movement in this stanza is obtained by the alternation of lines of 10, 5, 11, 5, 10, and 5 syllables respectively. The use of lines composed of uneven numbers of syllables was not, of course, an absolute innovation. The lyricism of the pre-Malherbe poets,

¹ This is the technical injunction behind Verlaine's "et pour cela préfère l'Impair."

the *Pléiade*, and still earlier poets is due to this practice, so far as to any technical cause. Baudelaire's *L'Invitation au Voyage* is in 557557 stanzas, so that it is probably the assymetry of Rimbaud's stanza which gives it its superior delicacy of rhythm. These attempts to explain the beauty of a poem are not meant to be taken very seriously; it was his sensibility which breathed away the stiffness. In any case, he did not break very drastically with tradition. He emancipated himself from certain unnecessarily stringent regulations and his example has resulted in the modification of the poetic code—a recent treatise on versification quotes on the same page from Racine, Hugo, and Rimbaud.

In the matter of rhyme he acted in the same way, taking what he wanted, what was really effective, and ignoring such surviving conventions as the alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes. The successful application of these liberties, of course, depends on the ear of the poet. Rimbaud, too, softened his rhymes, which was a common-sense proceeding in poems of very short lines where a rich rhyme would give a too strong effect:

Votre ardeur
Est le devoir.

This was a technical advance, because it gave the poets a more sensitive instrument, without abandoning any of the faculties of the old. He was not one of the theorists who say that one must not scan, or rhyme, which is a tyranny worse than that of the formal prosodists. He did write two poems in *vers libre* (in the modern sense, not that of La Fontaine) in lines without rhyme or metre, but the only advantage gained by this experiment, the absence of unwieldy grammatical connections, he transferred into his prose.

If so little of his secret can be seen in the outer form of his verse, then it is in its internal construction that we

must seek. This subordination of form to content is indeed most notable in these poems of *Les Illuminations*, and the very frequent overlapping of sense from one line to another anticipates the necessity which led him to concentrate on prose.

Tout est dans la richesse inouïe du pouvoir de confession, et l'inépuisable imprévu des images toujours adéquates.—*Laforgue*.¹

Confession—description—these are two words for the same faculty, and it is this eagerness to recount himself, his sensations, and his struggles, which obscures the formal element in his verse—rendered possible by the freedom of the caesura, the principal stay in the platform of eloquence.

This is a descriptive piece of *Mémoire*, the whole poem evocative of one of the crises of his childhood, only in these last stanzas he feels himself, in that curious way which indicates his intense absorption, *into* the objects he is describing,

Jouet de cet œil d'eau morne, Je n'y puis prendre,
O canot immobile! Oh! bras trop courts! ni l'une
Ni l'autre fleur: ni la jaune qui m'importune,
Là; ni la bleue, amis, à l'eau couleur de cendre.

Ah! la poudre des saules qu'une aile secoue!
Les roses des roseaux dès longtemps dévorées!
Mon canot, toujours fixe; et sa chaîne tirée
Au fond de cet œil d'eau sans bords,—à quelle boue?

Bruxelles is also a "description" in this sense, an impressionistic notation of the objects seen or thought of from a seat in the Boulevard du Regent. Seen or thought of, we say, because Rimbaud's difficulty was the lack of discrimination and measure with which ideas

¹ When Laforgue died only *Les Illuminations* had been published, besides the quotations in Verlaine's *Poètes Maudits*.

and sensations associated in his mind—so that for him a simple street becomes a

Réunion des scènes infinies.

In these few poems we find a very different Rimbaud from the *farouche* of the Proudhonesque period who scrawled on his banner: "Ni Maître ni Dieu." He is delicate, charming, and a little melancholy, but not lachrymose. For the most part he is smilingly resigned, and it is in the poems in which he first tenders his resignation to the world that his personality shows itself most amiable, free from the scowling features of revolt. Here he has a fresh and rural tone which it would be hard to match in modern literature, a simple enjoyment of Nature which has no need of the machinery of mythology or the botanical experts. "Happy as with a woman too," and in the same way, at least we could point to many passages which show that the earth was a lover to him, and always with feminine characteristics:

Ma fondre où fond ce usage sans guide,
—Oh! favorisé de ce qui est frais!
Expirer en ces violettes humides
Dont les aurores chargent ces forêts.

His last poems are the babblings of a wisdom so deep and clear that it escapes continuously the grasp of formal expression:

Que comprendre à ma parole ?
Il fait qu'elle fuit et vole !

Street-songs and music-hall ballads were, we know, great favourites of his—partly because such things were despised by the educational chiefs against whom he had revolted, partly because he enjoyed their directness of expression and the absence of literary trimmings. With Verlaine and the eccentric musician Cabaner he must often have indulged this taste, so that when he came to

feel first the questionings which led to *Une Saison en Enfer*, because they were most serious he welcomed the most frivolous forms of expression.

Here is the first note of self-criticism:

Oisive jeunesse
A toute asservie
Par délicatesse
J'ai perdu ma vie.

Then a thousand other voices, of friends or inherited experience, warn him of the futility and danger of his intellectual ambitions,

Ces mille questions
Qui se ramifient
N'amènent au fond
Qu'ivresse et folie.

But he has already escaped into the seclusion of egoism. *Eternité* is a very stoical injunction to maintain the independence through which he has achieved the vision of Eternity.

I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
All calm as it was bright.

Rimbaud has whittled down the expression to a suggestion which seems to us to exclude the idea of lateral boundaries which prevents even Vaughan's lovely image from being completely adequate.

Elle est retrouvée
Quoi ? L'Eternité.
C'est la mer allée
Avec le soleil.

In *Fêtes de la Faim* and *Comédie de la Soif* he approaches more closely to a consideration of the malady which has driven him to refuse all that the world has to offer him, even that which he had himself sought.

Is it a thirst which troubles him? In the dialogue of *Soifs* he is tempted by possible satisfactions. His ancestors exhort him to drink, but he replies:

Mourir aux fleuves barbares.

They offer him the purest beverages, cider and milk, and he replies:

Aller où boivent les vaches.

They offer him the sociable liquors, tea and coffee, and the satisfaction of images, but he replies:

Ah ! tarir toutes les urnes.

In the second part of the poem the last suggestion of his ancestors takes root. The legendary figures offer themselves to him:

Eternelles ondines,
Divisez l'eau fine ;

Vénus, sœur de l'azur,
Emeus le flot pur.

Juifs errants de Norvège
Dites-moi la neige ;

Anciens exilés chers,
Dites-moi la mer. . . .

But his thirst goes deeper than any desire even for that purely cerebral intoxication:

Non, plus ces boissons pures,
Ces fleurs d'eau pour verres ;
Légendes ni figures
Ne me désaltèrent.

In the last stanza he expresses marvellously the inarticulate monster which gnaws his entrails:

Chansonnier, ta filleule
C'est ma soif si folle ;
Hydre intime, sans gueules,
Qui mine et désole !

These poems are almost artless in the poignancy of their confession. This stanza is the exact essence of one of his outbreaks in the letters from Africa.

Si mon mal se résigne,
Si jamais j'ai quelque or,
Choiserai-je le Nord
Ou le pays des vignes ? . . .
Ah ! songer est indigne . . .

Where can this thirst be quenched, this hunger be stilled? At least its pain may be deadened by movement, by flight

Mes faims, Anne, Anne
Fuis sur ton âne.

And there was one other hostel for his distress. Remembering the boy who, at the outbreak of the war, had hoped to spend his holidays in sun-baths and infinite walks we can easily identify the "auberge verte" of which he speaks as the Inn of Nature, his solitary refuge from the irritations to which he was subjected. Nowhere in French literature is there expressed such a deep joy in the open air, not even in Rousseau, who invented the walking-tour, certainly not in the *mièvrerie* of the *Pléiade*, as in these few scattered stanzas of Rimbaud's, without feint or eloquence:

Les pigeons qui tremblent dans la prairie,
Le gibier, qui court et qui voit la nuit,
Les bêtes des eaux, la bête asservie,
Les derniers papillons ! ont soif aussi.

Mais fondre ou fond ce nuage sans guide . . .
Oh ! favorisé de ce qui soit frais,
Expirer en ces violettes humides
Dont les aurores chargent ces forêts.

And there is one other poem, truly the resolution of his perplexity, in which the form has so melted into the

sensation that the one can hardly be distinguished from the other. That he found words for it at all is a miracle:

Le ciel est joli comme un Ange,
Azur et Onde communient.
Je sors ! Si un rayon me blesse,
Je succomberai sur la mousse.

He has stripped away the social man, the eighteenth-century Man of Feeling. He is a nerve, vibrating to the solar energy, without other organization than that of response to the waves of light which rock him in the ocean of Eternity:

Je veux bien que les Saisons m'usent.
A Toi, Nature ! Je me rends,
Et ma faim et toute ma soif ;
Et s'il te plait, nourris, abreve.
Rien de rien ne m'illusionne :
C'est rire au parents qu'au soleil ;
Mais moi je ne veux rire à rien
Et libre soit cette infortune.

But it was one thing to achieve this isolation in a moment of vision, quite another to maintain it in the world of social exigencies. In the poems in prose we find many traces of the attempt to externalize the conditions necessary for the existence of this Natural Man, this man of Sense, to find an outlet for the primordial energy which we others have, however inefficiently, diverted into sentiments and ideals which assure the continuity of the species. All the little concessions to our sensual egoism, such as fame and property, were no sop to his rapacity.

XV

LES ILLUMINATIONS: POEMS IN PROSE

Million d'oiseaux d'or, ô future Vigueur.

ONE of the most superficial observations about this part of Rimbaud's work is not the least significant. That is, to point out the negligence of the poet as to the fate of these manuscripts in contrast to the careful re-copying which occupied him when he stayed at Douai. The artist had given way to the seer or visionary, to whom it was enough to have perceived and to have fixed a vision for himself. Little matter if we others should be blind except to a narrow range of forms and grammatical constructions. His ambition is a private one. "If that which comes from down there has form, I will give it form; if it has no form I will leave it formless," he said, and *Les Illuminations* is the result of the application of that rule.

It is here that we are in touch with the poet as a psychological manifestation; the artist, a social development, being momentarily discarded. We touch the sources of inspiration. We may compare with Rimbaud's metaphor of *down there* the anecdote of Trelawney, about Shelley's first draft of a lyric. "It was a frightful scrawl, words smeared out with his fingers, and one upon another, over and over in tiers," etc., and Shelley's reply: "When my brain gets heated with a thought, it soon boils, and throws off images and words faster than I can skim them off. In the morning when cooled down, out of the rude sketch, as you justly call it, I shall attempt a drawing."

The mythical blindness of the bard, the poetic frenzy and the metaphor of inspiration, are so many attempts

to define the conditions under which poetic creation takes place, and on which, in fundamentals, Shelley's and Rimbaud's evidence agrees. At the period of Rimbaud's intensest concentration, however, his atrocious scepticism made him question the authenticity of a drawing made after cooling down. In *Fairy*, *Being Beauteous*, and *Barbare*, for instance, I imagine we have an all but direct transcription of what was passing in his mind. It might be thought that this method of composition would be artistically worthless, as indeed it would be if the person submitting to it were not an artist. The subconscious which he touched in his trances, which all poets touch, being a mass without soul or personality, would be useless in art, except that no glimpse of it can reach the consciousness, even the semi-consciousness of dreams or automatic writing, without passing first the censorship of the poet's personality, and then that of his communal sense. These pieces are peculiar in that in them the second is inhibited.

"He is seeking the absolute, which the great artist, with his careful wisdom, has renounced seeking." There is a seed of truth in that acre of fallacy, the only barren spot in Mr. Symon's early essay on Rimbaud, for the artistic sense is offended by botched work and by the shapelessness which comes from straining ambition above the natural powers. But I cannot think the great poets have been either so careful or so wise as many minor ones; their artistry, like their genius, has been a pure and unconditional gift.

So though one appreciates the criticism and sometimes regrets that there is such an insolent disregard of the reader's convenience in these pieces, one has also sufficient faith in Rimbaud to believe that they could not have been written otherwise. In any case, he did not ask us to read them, and had he published them he might have smoothed away many difficulties. But I do

not think he would have altered them in structure. If the forms made by the mind hamper the mind, then it must discard them or accept the eternal symmetry of ants and bees. No price was too great for him to pay to escape the death of formalism. "Qu'est mon néant, auprès de la stupeur qui vous attend?" he demands. But for all that, the writer of this prose never falters.

For it is in a sort of nothingness, as he says, that these moments of illumination end. As we thread each path of the maze we are brought up short by a gulf of light. That is the Absolute to which he leads us, from which in the latter pieces we see that he has begun to retrace his steps. This gulf which stopped him so abruptly was not Nirvana, but the Fountain of Life. It will be suggested, because of the disintegration or annihilation of reality in which many of his poems culminate, that he aimed at the primordial, non-conceptual existence in which rises the source of all psychic energy.

Un coup de ton doigt sur le tambour décharge tous les sons et commence la nouvelle harmonie.

A word on the literary art of these poems in prose. Rimbaud, in the above quotation, defined this art in an example of it. Paul Claudel, in his enthusiastic praise of the prose of *Une Saison en Enfer*, lets fall a phrase which enlightens us as to the nature of these pieces, its predecessor: "La marche de la pensée . . . procède non plus par développement logique, mais, comme chez un musicien, par dessins mélodiques et le rapport de notes juxtaposées."

That in this disuse of logic Rimbaud was bringing his art in much closer touch with the processes of thought, as distinct from the means of communication between members of society, will be obvious to anyone who has examined his mental life. Logic is a good

servant, but the method of linking effect to cause which has resulted in material triumphs, has created grotesque monuments in the world of thought. May all poets be defended from the illogical, which is detestable, and may all critics recognize that the mental world is non-logical.

In reading these pieces, then, one must be content to be the drum. Rimbaud's phrases are so created that their impact sets up a complex development of the thought which is directed, but not stilled, by each succeeding one. The effect of submitting to this process, for it is better not to attempt to follow it, is more exhausting than any argumentative reading. So does an excess of logic deaden the faculties and render them unfitted for higher exercises.

A biographical commentary has sufficed to elucidate the poems in verse. For the others this would not be sufficient. To look in these pieces for the description of reality is to fail to perceive their nature, and to regard them as arbitrarily distorted pictures is equally to misunderstand them. Although certain objects or events may be recognized in them, it is only by regarding them as part of the pure subjectivity of the whole that their meaning appears. Rimbaud was continually (under hallucination perhaps) duplicating his consciousness, and the essential part of him, shall we say the sub-conscious, took for its manifestation a form of scene, figure, or garments which translated its qualities, inexpressible except in images. Sometimes the identification is complete, and we have a unique poem; sometimes his self-consciousness impatiently obtrudes and the vision is flawed.

Aube is one of his most completely achieved poems, and at first seems to contradict what has been said about the absence of objective description in these pieces. The joy and wonder of the first light and its successive

passages are captured in images of rare delicacy. It is as a moment of pure ecstasy that we present it here, but under dissection it would reveal its kinship with the rest.

AUBE

J'ai embrassé l'aube d'été.

Rien ne bougeait encore au front des palais. L'eau était morte. Les camps d'ombres ne quittaient pas la route du bois. J'ai marché, réveillant les haleines vives et tièdes ; et les pierres regardèrent, et les ailes se levèrent sans bruit.

La première entreprise fut, dans le sentier déjà empli de frais et blêmes éclats, une fleur qui me dit son nom.

Je ris au wasserfall qui s'échevela à travers les sapins : à la cime argentée je reconnus la déesse.

Alors je levai un à un les voiles. Dans l'allée, en agitant les bras. Par la plaine, où je l'ai dénoncée au coq. A la grand'ville, elle fuyait parmi les clochers et les dômes ; et, courant comme un mendiant sur les quais de marbre, je la chassais.

En haut de la route, près d'un bois de lauriers, je l'ai entourée avec ses voiles amassés, et j'ai senti un peu son immense corps. L'aube et l'enfant tombèrent au bas du bois.

Au réveil, il était midi.

Though *Les Illuminations* is a fragment, it is a princely one. It is the creation of fervour and confidence in an inexhaustible fecundity of images. The visionary strikes unknown chords on the keyboard of prose, but he is never languid or voluptuously swooning. In his territory it is never afternoon, no lotus grows there. Strange that he should have been claimed as a chief of decadents. There is not in these poems a concession to weakness, not a sentiment. Nothing but perception, sensual or psychological. He is among us like a young chief of barbarians who has sacked all the libraries of a purer world and scorns to warm himself at our fires and feed from our pot. Out of the books he has read he has picked the vision of a superior existence which might be

achieved but for the figures of the present, his own inhibitions rather than the incomprehension of his contemporaries, which obtrude themselves. For it is technical learning which he has absorbed, he has leapt the centuries of intellectual effort at a bound, but the centuries of organized feeling cannot be leapt. He has cast out of his heart, as though they never existed there, all affections and greedy passions, all humiliating humility and superstitious adoration. To those sorcerers, misery and hatred, he entrusted the treasure of his sensibility that they might bring it to fruition, to a superhuman perfection before it was even human.

As we said at the end of the last chapter, these pieces mark his attempts to define the conditions necessary to his existence without compromise, at the full intensity of his desire. So we find here and there the persistence of his belief that some new social order might be in harmony with his ambitions, that by means of the expansion of both the moral and the economic life a society might be created in which his immense energy could work unhampered. In *Génie* he announces the terms of a new morality, not weighing actions in the scale-pans of reward and punishment, but with the sense of the inevitable perfection of the deeds to which we spring:

O ses souffles, ses têtes, ses courses: la terrible célérité de la perfection des forms et de l'action.

O fécondité de l'esprit et immensité de l'univers.

Son corps! le dégagement rêvé, le brisement de la grace croisé de violence nouvelle!

Sa vue, sa vue, tous les agenouillages anciens et les peines relevées à sa suite. . . .

Son pas! les migrations plus énormes que les anciens invasions:

O lui et nous! l'orgueil plus bienveillant que les charités perdues.

O monde! et le chant clair de malheurs nouveaux!

L'orgueil plus bienveillant que les charités perdues!

That is a spiritual discovery such as one of the early Fathers might have made. Nietzsche would have envied it, and it is free of the pedantic apparatus with which he sometimes supported his convictions, simple as a physical sensation, and bracing as the touch of a Northern sea.

In *Matinée d'Ivresse* he has reached such a pitch of egoism that he claims to have his own ultimate values, even his own Good and his own Beauty. This poisonous ideal he knows will remain in his veins even when, his intoxication having subsided, he is returned to the conditions of ordinary life.

O maintenant [he cries], nous si dignes de ces tortures! rassemblons fervermment cette promesse surhumaine faite à notre corps et à notre âme créés : cette promesse, cette demence. L'élégance, la science, la violence! On nous a promis d'enterrer dans l'ombre l'arbre du bien et du mal, de déporter les honnetetés tyranniques, afin que nous ramenions notre très pur amour.

The nature of this "love" which he so characteristically associates with violence¹ and knowledge begins to be apparent. In such a visionary Utopia as *Villes I* he creates the sort of community in which his desire might be appeased. It is an orgy of imaginative delight.

Des chalets de cristal et de bois se meuvent sur des rails et des poulies invisibles. . . . Des fêtes amoureuses sonnent sur les canaux pendus derrière les chalets. . . . L'écroulement des apothéoses rejoint les champs des hauteurs où les centauresses sérapiques évoluent parmi les avalanches. Au-dessus du niveau des plus hautes crêtes, une mer troublée par la naissance éternelle de Vénus. . . . Là-haut, les pieds dans les cascades et les ronces, les cerfs tettent Diane. . . .

¹ "Elles ont palis, merveilleuses,
Au grand soleil d'amour chargé
Sur la bronze de mitrailleuses
A travers Paris in s

Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie.

The mental powers are raised to their extreme intensity, the impulses of the past and present reinforce the common vigour:

Des groupes de beffrois chantent les idées des peuples. Des châteaux bâtis en os sort la musique inconnue. Toutes les légendes évoluent et les élans se ruent dans les bourgs. . . .

But of the social organization on which this creative life is based we hear only in an echo in the tone of the ancient communist—

Je suis descendu dans le mouvement d'un boulevard de Bagdad où des compagnies ont chanté la joie du travail nouveau.

For he himself cannot grasp the secret of that existence any more than the child could clasp the dawn in the poem *Aube*, and the vision concludes, like so many others, with the failure to maintain himself in this condition to which he aspires.

Quels bons bras, quelle belle heure me rendront cette région d'où viennent mes sommeils et mes moindres mouvements?

It would take too long to follow the theme throughout the *Illuminations*. In *Solde* we have perhaps the concisest expression of it. He offers for sale the riches of his genius, and among them "l'éveil fraternel de toutes les énergies chorales et orchestrales et leurs applications instantanées! l'occasion, unique, de dégager nos sens!"

But that is apparently irreconcilable with the mutual concessions necessary for social harmony. "Rimbaud was an unsociable creature," said Cros, who suffered from him, "and shut all the doors of friendship as if he enjoyed doing so."

Certain of the characteristics of hallucination may be recognized in these poems. The significance of objects has no relation to the normal order. The sense of duration has gone, and only that of succession remains.

But the historical sequence is broken. There is no knowing whether a First Empire nymph or a barbarian horde will next appear on the scene. To read some of them is like turning swiftly the pages of a *Petit Larousse Illustré*. The stable appearance of things is dissolved and a breach is made like that through which the religious mystics have observed the splendours of Paradise. "Un souffle ouvre des brèches opéradiques dans les cloisons,—brouille le pivotement des toits rongés,—disperse les limites des foyers,—éclipse les croisées." Rimbaud most frequently sees the tumbled universe of childhood, when the sensations are not yet aligned in a conventional perspective. His trances are invaded by memories from that inexhaustible world, "Que le monde était plein de fleurs cet été!" Its painted toys and its legends mingle with the debris of the ordinary world with no regard for their relative dimensions, like the details in a Primitive picture. "On tira les barques vers la mer étagée là-haut comme sur les gravures" is one of many instances. In the ruts of a damp track under the shadow of a hedge he sees this procession pass:

Des chars chargés d'animaux de bois doré, de mâts et de toiles bariolées, au grand galop de vingts chevaux de cirque tachetés et les enfants, et les hommes, sur leur bêtes les plus étonnantes—vingt véhicules, bossés, pavoisés et fleuris comme des Carosses anciens ou de Contes, pleins d'enfants attifés pour une pastorale suburbaine. Même des cercueils sous leur dais de nuit dressant les panâches d'ébène, filant au trot des grandes juments bleus et noirs.

He himself does not know to what he would attain; it seems that his satisfaction is simply in the destruction of the familiar world. But he is evidently seeking something, to recover something, or to return somewhere, for the sense of exile is often with him. He spoke of himself as "Cette âme égarée parmi nous tous." In his failure

to achieve this return he came to worship the disorder of his mind as being a frontier state to his own kingdom. For his failure is very frequently expressed, even so early as *Les Déserts de l'Amour*, which concludes:

Puis O désespoir, le cloison devint vaguement l'ombre des arbres, et je me suis abîmé sous la tristesse amoureuse de la nuit.

Or in *Bruxelles*:

C'est beau, trop beau, gardons notre silence

Or in the conclusion of *Aube*, or *Ouvriers*:

Un rayon blanc, tombant du haut de ciel, anéantit cette comédie.

Some of this disorder may result from a mischievous desire to mystify, as when he says at the end of *Parade*:

J'ai seul la clef de cette parade sauvage,

a deliberate withholding of the clue and the shortcomings of a manuscript which must be extremely unsatisfactory. Even then the greater number of poems are of transparent finish, obscure if at all from excess of light, or sometimes marred even by a commonplace Polytechnic pedantism.

The ceaseless transposition of qualities is one of the resources of poetic creation and the result of a primary disintegration. The man who wrote

The dawn with silver-sandalled feet

was not, we may be sure, the originator of the metaphor, the man who *saw* dawn like that.

Leconte de Lisle accomplished an act of literary, not of psychological, creation when he wrote

L'aube au flanc noir des monts marche d'un pied vermeil,

as Rimbaud did in

La Nuit vient, noir pirate aux cieux d'or débarquant.

But in this, from *Mystique*, conceived, I do not doubt, lying face upwards under a hedge on a starry night, there is a nugget of virgin gold:

La douceur fleurie des étoiles, et du ciel, et du reste, descend en face du talus, comme un panier, contre notre face et fait l'abîme fleurant et bleu là-dessous.

There is a great wealth of such creation in *Les Illuminations*, scattered with the carelessness of a great poet, which [the artist might have collected and later displayed in a proper setting. It is for this reason that he respected the Greeks alone, because they were the great creators of metaphor, of things perceived, or seers, which modern poets, particularly the French, have often only copied.¹ Rimbaud was too impatient, but his name can rest securely on a number of poems which can be enjoyed without commentary. Such is *Aube*, such is *Antique*, a Bacchus of singular beauty, with a just agreeable distortion:

Gracieux fils de Pan! Autour de ton front couronné de fleurettes et de baies, tes yeux, des boules précieuses, remuent. Tachées de lie brune, tes joues se creusent. Tes crocs luisent. Ta poitrine ressemble à une cithare, des tintements circulent dans tes bras blonds. Ton cœur bat dans ce ventre où dort le double sex. Promène-toi, la nuit, en mouvant doucement cette cuisse, cette seconde cuisse, et cette jambe de gauche.

But if his art could function generally only at the expense of some confusion or distortion, there must be some great difference between his art and that which we call art. And there was, for with us art is the setting of limits where psychologically there are no limits.

¹ See letter, page 202.

Rimbaud desired his art to disregard even this capital condition, even though chaos be the price.

If we discover the object which lies beneath the subjectivity of the majority of the poems in prose, and find that it is for something without limits, for something absolute, we shall understand why he wrote

Maintenant je puis dire que l'art est une sottise.

There is one characteristic which is common to all the poems in prose, and that is their subjectivity. All the personages of whom he writes are emanations of his own nature. In *Aube* he is the child pursuing his desire. Hortense, Hélène, and the figure in *Being Beauteous* are images of this Demon dissociated from his earthly self. Even the setting is a refraction through his mind of some scene remembered or imagined. External reality only enters the poem to destroy it. What was this ambition which drove him to a combat in which he was continually defeated? Naturally, he himself could not say, but the traces may be followed up with a little persistence; it is a combat like that of Jacob with the Angel.

Let us not attempt for the moment to name this Spirit which urges him and which he seeks to clasp. If we recognize it under its successive metamorphoses we may perhaps arrive at the point of perception. It is the x in an algebraic equation. On the surface *Angoisse* is one of the most baffling poems, but let us test it by this process:

Se peut-il qu'Elle [the Spirit] me fasse pardonner les ambitions continuellement écrasées—qu'une fin aisée répare les âges d'indigence—qu'un jour de succès nous endorme sur la honte de notre inhabilité fatale?

The quashed ambitions, the periods of beggary, the fatal inability are all forms, as the conclusion of many

poems has shown us, of the tyrannous reassertion of the real world.

The poem continues with a parenthesis of adoration which brings us a little nearer to the nature of the Spirit.

(O palmes ! diamant ! amour, force !—plus haut que toutes joies et gloires !—de toute façon—partout, démon, dieu—jeunesse de cet être-ci : moi !)

Love and Force, infernal or divine, are placed far above joys and glories, and this love and force we see quite plainly are qualities of his own nature, those predominant in—Youth.

Is it possible, he asks again—

Que les accidents de féerie scientifique et des mouvements de fraternité sociale soient chéris comme restitution progressive de la franchise première ? . . .

We know with what intensity he had flung himself into the struggle for social emancipation. It was not precisely from altruism that he had acted, but in the hope of restoring the conditions of original freedom, which are identical with those of individual youth,

As free as Nature first made man
When wild in woods the noble savage ran.

He is no longer assured of the efficacy of that means nor of the scientific marvels which his age regarded with such naïve satisfaction.

In the next paragraph the Spirit appears as the Vampire who has withdrawn from him these material means of salvation but still exercises her domination :

Mais le Vampire qui nous rend gentils commande que nous nous amusions avec ce qu'elle nous laisse, ou qu'autrement nous soyons plus drôles.

And the poem concludes with the exhortation to fakirism indicated in the title:

Rouler aux blessures, par l'air lassant et la mer ; aux tortures qui rient dans leur silence atrocement houleux.

This gloss makes it appear that the α of the equation is a quality of his own, or an association of qualities, predominant in the early years of life, and which, in this instance, he hoped to regain by a drastic self-torment.

In *Being Beauteous* the figure is "un être de beauté de haute taille." This is again our α . She stands against the snow, far from the world (M. Jacques Rivière has pointed out in his admirable study the obsession of the idea of *extremity* in these poems), and by the magnetism of her action the sensibility is re-born,

Oh! nos os sont revêtus d'un nouveau corps amoureux.

Always we are drawn towards the beginning of life as the point of maximum intensity. The return to chaos, the end of the world, M. Rivière sees as the object of these poems. But he does not define which *end* of the world.

Pour l'enfance d'Hélène [the Spirit again] frissonèrent les fourrées et les ombres, et le sein des pauvres.

Or again, there is Hortense, who has been "*sous la surveillance d'une enfance, l'ardente hygiène des races.*" We are told that "*sa porte est ouverte à la misère.*" Again we notice the dissolution of images, the frequency of words like shudder, as though the world were nothing but a vast system of vibrations—and again the sense of youngness:

O terrible frisson des amours novices sur le sol sanglant et sous l'hygiène clareux.

It is quite plain that this spirit which draws him is something as primitive as Force, something on whose

great bulk our restrictions and codes, our affections even, and our ideals are of no more moment than the clinging barnacles and trailing weeds on the whale's back.

Our own poets Vaughan, Traherne, and Wordsworth have celebrated the purity and divinity of the child's vision. Rimbaud has but given the same convictions a metaphysical basis. Now does not the child's pursuit of dawn and his falling to slumber take on a new significance? And how simple appears the poem *Après la Déluge*.

Aussitôt que l'idée du Déluge se fut rassise. . . .

So soon as we felt ourselves secure from a cataclysm, from any possibility of destruction and re-birth, all sorts of stupid things took place:

Un lièvre s'arrêta dans les clochettes mouvantes, et dit sa prière à l'arc-en-ciel, à travers la toile de l'araignée. . . .

Oh ! les pierres précieuses qui se cachaient—les fleurs qui regardaient déjà. . . . Madame * * * établit un piano dans les Alpes. . . .

Les caravanes partirent. Et le Splendide Hôtel fut bâti dans le chaos de glaces et de nuit du pôle.

But these banalities obscure the vision of the poet who calls down the waters for their destruction:

Sourds, étang—écume, roule sur le pont et passe par-dessus les bois—draps noirs et orgues, éclairs et tonnerre, montez et roulez; eaux et tristesses, montez et relevez les déluges.

Car depuis qu'ils se sont dissipés—oh, les pierres précieuses s'enfouissant et les fleurs ouvertes !—c'est un ennui ! Et la Reine, la Sorcière qui allume sa braise dans le pot de terre, ne voudra jamais nous raconter ce qu'elle sait, et que nous ignorons.

So, having perceived the gulf towards which he was driving, hard-headed Rimbaud realized that he was a physical being, at least for the moment, and not a metaphysical hypothesis. As such he had been flirting with dissolution. His mental organism could no more

withstand the touch of that fountain-head of energy than any fleshly creature the force of a high-voltage current: "J'attends de devenir un très méchant fou."

When exactly this crisis arrived we cannot say. There are several references which leave no doubt as to its occurrence, such as, for instance, "Les hallucinations tourbillonnaient trop" and "Le terreur venait," etc. Most probably it was about the middle of 1872. There are at any rate a number of prose poems which show little, if any, trace of hallucination, and which might well have been written after that crisis. Such are *Conte* and *Royauté* and *Vagabonds*.

The first expresses most lucidly his character and his recognition of the failure of his ambition. It not only illustrates, as Claudel points out, the destructive side of his nature, but also the possibility of the co-existence of himself and his demon in the conditions of ordinary life. He has even an inkling that his absolutism might be an excess of virtue, an aberration of piety—this desire "pour voir l'heure du satisfaction et du désir essentiels. Néanmoins il le voulut. Il avait au moins une assez large pouvoir humaine."

This poem was perhaps suggested by one of those called *Spleen* by Baudelaire, in which, too, there is a Prince who cannot find satisfaction:

Rien ne peut l'égayer, ni gibier, ni faucon,
Ni son peuple mourant en face du balcon. . . .

But the malady of Rimbaud is the reverse of this, and the source of his profound originality. His desire is not too weak to be pleased, but so strong that it consumes whatever is put before it in a tireless pursuit of the essential satisfaction:

Toutes les femmes qui l'avaient connue furent assassinées : quel saccage du jardin de la Beauté ! Sous la sabre, elles le bénirent. Il n'en commanda point de nouvelles—les femmes réapparurent.

Il tua tous ceux qui le suivaient, après la chasse ou les libations— Tous le suivaient. . . . Peut on s'extasier dans la destruction, se rajeunir par la cruauté ! Le peuple ne murmura pas. Personne n'offrit le concours de ses vœux.

The world and all its treasures are but fuel for this desire. Nothing can be denied it and yet it is eternally unsatisfied. "La musique savante manque à notre désir" he admits with a splendid frankness. Yet from this idea of the identity of the Prince and the Génie he drew the inspiration of one of the loveliest of his poems. In *Royauté* it is the man and the woman, the individual in harmony whose wish is sufficient to achieve its realization:

Un beau matin, chez un peuple fort doux, un homme et une femme superbe criaient sur la place publique: "Mes amis, je veux qu'elle soit reine!" "Je veux être reine!" Elle riait et tremblait. Il parlait aux amis de révélation, d'épreuve terminée. Ils se pamaient l'un contre l'autre.

En effet, ils furent rois toute une matinée, où les tentures carminées se relevèrent sur les maisons, et tout l'après-midi, où ils s'avancèrent du côté des jardins de palmes.

From this point of wisdom, this *bonheur*, this pinnacle from which he sang in the *Chanson de la plus haute tour*,

Ce charme! il prit âme et corps,
Et dispersa tous efforts.

he did not descend. It is identical with the concluding phrase of *Une Saison de Enfer*, when he says that it will be simple for him to possess the truth in a soul and a body.

The object of Rimbaud's desire may be compared with the state of identity with Nature or Reality which Lévy-Bruhl calls "participation mystique." It is a condition which cannot be expressed by verbal concepts because it evades the consciousness, whether reached through physical love or delight in a sunrise. Rimbaud's

sublimation, by long looking-inward, of this erotic joy (from the girl in *Les Déserts de l'Amour* to the goddess in *Aube*; from the dawn-dewed violets of *Soifs* to the sunlit sea of *Eternité*) symbolizes the dissociation of his desire from sensuous objects, by which means he achieved the happiness of living constantly in the absolute of pure joy.

It was in this mood of self sufficiency (brutal, or angelical it may be, certainly unhuman) that he said: "J'envoyais au diable les palmes de martyrs et les rayons de l'art." His attempts to change the external world were superfluous now, his aesthetic as well as his social crusade. There was no more need to seek outside himself for the essential satisfaction he desired. But he found that the withdrawal of desire from objects (introversion) leads to mental disaster. "Spring," he said, "brought me the idiot's frightful chuckle." It was as if his beloved Nature had added her insult to Society's. In face of it his visions and his idealism seemed to be so many weaknesses and he held a bargain sale of all the promises of his genius:

A vendre ce que Juifs n'ont pas vendu, ce que noblesse ni crime n'ont goûté. . . . Elan insensé et infini aux splendeurs invisibles, aux délices insensibles. . . .

So, with that recognition of the senseless splendour of his vow we take leave of the visionary.

XVI

VALEDICTORY : *UNE SAISON EN ENFER*

RIMBAUD was not one of us. That is obvious from the few points at which his art makes contact with normal experience.

It is the reason for the pitiful failure of his literary life, and when the condemnation of Verlaine filled up the tale of his degradations, he seized on the idea of his pagan or negro book as a means of unravelling the net of his discomfiture. Such is the origin of *Une Saison en Enfer*. It is not only a spiritual autobiography, but a re-living of his past in order to determine his future conduct, a re-dealing of the cards in order to draw omens as to the possibility of an understanding between his instinct of liberty and the forces of civilization. It is an interior drama and has his peculiar spasmodic violence, for he writes to resolve a combat, directly, whilst it is still taking place. Hence the extraordinary density of the feeling with which every phrase is charged.

With the main points of his early life in mind, *Une Saison en Enfer* ceases to be an esoteric text. It is full of reminiscences of the Bible and the Catechism, themselves quintessential phrasings, and it is of the Christian hell that he is thinking in the title. No doubt, also, he had Faust in mind, for when he began to write it he asked Delahaye to buy him a translation of Goethe.

The germ of the book was in his old conception of himself as a nigger or pagan (angel or demon, we might add), as something with no stake in the modern world, but he does not at once see to what this leads. When he does so he stops writing. So the body of the book is a

drama in which his real personality fights the personality imposed on him by society and his education, and its intense prose is broken by brusque ironies and sharp vindictive returns.

The first poem, which was probably written after most of the others, resumes his development up to the opening of the book. In these few steely lines he expresses what I have been trying to convey in these many pages:

Jadis, si je me souviens bien, ma vie était un festin où s'ouvraient tous les cœurs, où tous le vins coulaient.

Un soir, j'ai assis la Beauté sur mes genoux. Et je l'ai trouvée amère—Et je l'ai injuriée.

Je me suis armé contre la justice.

Je me suis enfui. O sorcières, ô misère, ô haine, c'est à vous que mon trésor a été confié !

Je parvins à faire s'évanouir dans mon esprit toute l'espérance humaine.

Sur toute joie, pour l'étrangler, j'ai fait le bond sourd de la bête féroce.

J'ai appelé les bourreaux pour, en périssant, mordre la crosse de leurs fusils. . . . Le malheur a été mon dieu. Je me suis allongé dans la boue. Je me suis séché à l'air du crime. . . . Et le printemps m'a apporté l'affreux rire de l'idiot.

So, being at his last gasp, he dreamt of rediscovering the key to his original delight, and it occurred to him that Charity, the key-stone of Christian ethics, might be the means of that revival. He rejects that suggestion, which proves he says "that I have been dreaming." Certain commentators have dated their religious conversion from their contact with Rimbaud; it may be so, but it was certainly *à rebours*, for every time that salvation through the Church is offered him, throughout this struggle, he sharply refuses it. He refuses even Christ without the Church, as the prose poem suggested by the miracle of the Pool of Bethesda, considered by some an

abandoned prologue to this book, explicitly concludes. For without descending into the water Rimbaud, the paralytic, rose to his feet:

Et ce fut d'un pas singulièrement assuré qu'ils le virent franchir la galerie et disparaître dans la Ville, les Damnés.

So the drama opens with the poem *Mauvais Sang*, in which he seeks in his heredity, in an atavism from his barbarian ancestors, the root of his incomprehension of the civilized ideals:

J'ai de mes ancêtres gaulois l'œil bleu blanc, le cerveau étroite, et la maladresse dans la lutte. Je trouve mon habillement aussi barbare que le leur. Mais je ne beurre pas ma chevelure.

It is in these that originated the defects of temperament which explain the despised position to which he has fallen:

D'eux, j'ai; l'idolâtrie et l'amour du sacrilège—oh! tous les vices, colère, luxure—magnifique, la luxure;—surtout mensonge et paresse.

He continues to follow his heredity along the path of history, as one of this inferior race, whose history runs parallel to that of France. For he remembers the events of the Middle Ages, but it must have been as a serf that he followed the Crusaders across the Suabian plains, whence his memories of Byzantium and the ramparts of Solyma. In this way, too, he absorbed something of the traditions of his overlords "le culte de Marie, l'attendrissement sur le crucifié s'éveillent en moi parmi mille féeries profanes."

He cannot find any traces of his pre-existence after the end of the Renaissance. There are no more vague wars, no employment for the *reître* he has been, no more vagabonds. The *Grand Siècle* has completely socialized his race. He finds himself again in the present, but he is alone.

So there is no hope for him in Europe, he must seek elsewhere for the conditions which render possible his existence:

Me voici sur la plage armoricaine. Que les villes s'allument dans le soir. Ma journée est faite ; je quitte l'Europe. . . . L'air marin brulera mes poumons ; les climats perdus me tanneront. Nager, broyer l'herbe, chasser, fumer surtout ; boire des liqueurs fortes comme du métal bouillant—comme faisaient ces chers ancêtres autour des feux.

We may ignore the convolutions of his argument to rejoin it a page or two farther on and discover a nigger dancing wildly to the sound of the tom-toms, oblivious of the approaching whites.

None the less they arrive, the white men ; they disembark, and they have cannon. " Il faut se soumettre au baptême, s'habiller, travailler." Reason is born in him. The black convert is the pride of the mission-hall. He announces his salvation :

Le monde est bon. Je bénirai la vie. J'aimerai mes frères. Ce ne sont plus des promesses d'enfance. Ni l'espoir d'échapper à la vieillesse et à la mort. Dieu fait ma force et je loue Dieu.

So far the idea of his original innocence has sustained him in face of the antagonism of the world. It has been the motive of this poem :

Prêtres, professeurs, maîtres, vous vous trompez en me livrant à la justice. Je n'ai jamais été de ce peuple-ci ; je n'ai jamais été chrétien ; je suis de la race qui chantait dans le supplice, je ne comprends pas les lois, je n'ai pas le sens moral, je suis une brute ; vous vous trompez.¹

Then, as he does not come within the range of the moral law, there is as yet no talk of hell. He abandons

¹ The same voice demanded at the age of nine : " Quel mal leur ai-je fait pour qu'ils me flanquent au supplice." The complaint was against learning Latin and Greek, the base of civilization.

the god he had just praised since he desires liberty even in choosing the means of his own salvation. Both contempt and charity have their rights, he sees, and balances himself on this common-sense conclusion. But at the end of the poem the natural savage has been subdued by the exigencies of civilization—tools, weapons, and a sense of time.

In the third poem the scene moves to hell. The innocent writhes on the ground, his limbs deformed with agonizing pains. "J'ai avalé une fameuse gorgée de poison." This poison which has rendered him susceptible to the pains of hell, which has given the brute a conscience and a moral sense, and awakened him to the pangs of shame and remorse, is nothing but his religious education:

Je me crois en enfer, donc j'y suis. C'est l'exécution du catéchisme. Je suis esclave de mon baptême. Parents, vous avez fait mon malheur et vous avez fait le vôtre. Pauvre innocent !

The horror of it wrings a cry from him, which he stifles with a sneer:

Pitié ! Seigneur, j'ai peur. J'ai soif, si soif. Ah ! l'enfance, l'herbe, la pluie, le lac sur les pierres, le clair de lune quand le clocher sonnait douze . . . le diable est au clocher, à cette heure. Marie ! Sainte Vierge ! . . . Horreur de ma bêtise !

He has reckoned the effects of his remote ancestry and his immediate parentage, and after that tantalizing glimpse of his childhood he passes to a reconsideration of his adolescence. As befits a tormented soul, his thoughts are hardly coherent, though there is no lassitude in the phrases he emits. He boasts of the wealth of his genius, and of his voluntary silence:

Je m'en tairai : poètes et visionnaires seraient jaloux. Je suis mille fois le plus riche, soyons avare comme la mer.

He is a master in phantasmagoria. He shouts like a mountebank in front of his booth:

Veut-on des chants nègres, des danses de houris? Veut-on que je disparaisse, que je plonge à la recherche de l'anneau? Veut-on? Je ferai de l'or, des remèdes.

This return of his old aesthetic ambitions is followed by the revival of his Messianic campaign, only this time, in his disillusionment, he is not the proud seer of *Les Illuminations*, but an obsequious huckster in the market-square:

Fiez-vous donc à moi, la foi soulage, guide, guérit. Tous venez, même les petits enfants—que je vous console, qu'on répande pour vous son cœur—le cœur merveilleux!—Pauvres hommes, travailleurs! Je ne demande pas de prières, avec votre confiance seulement je serai heureux.

Then, lest we should think he is asking for any assistance from us, any pity, he dissipates with a blow the faint fabric of sympathy the last poem had built up:

Bah! faisons toutes les grimaces imaginables.

But, even though the fire of his torment mounts with him, he endeavours to climb back to life to cast a glance on the deformities which have damned him. It is here, in the centre of the poem, that he has placed the two pieces entitled *Délires*, for they are the explanation of his actual sufferings. These deliriums, as he calls them now, are accounts of his two principal ambitions, the one to create a new nature, the other a correspondingly new art.

Écoutons la confession d'un compagnon d'enfer.

The first of these has been described as the relation of the friendship between Rimbaud and Verlaine. In a sense this is true, and we may believe that the Foolish Virgin is a very bitterly just analysis of Verlaine's

character. But I think the subjective interpretation is more true; the other was hardly important enough for him to trouble about, as he did not even mention the Brussels affair in the book. Verlaine's character, as he had observed it, was a convenient receptacle for the conveyance of his ideas about his own inner and outer personalities, and some means of division had to be found. The influence of the Bible is again obvious in his choice of characters; the Foolish Virgin represents his practical self, the Infernal Bridegroom is his demon, and stands for the ambition which tormented him and ruined him. "Drôle de ménage," he says, and such a household could not dwell for long in one body. In depth and delicacy of line, in psychology and picturesque relief and its dazzling pride this portrait of Rimbaud by himself has not been surpassed. The Foolish Virgin describes her Bridegroom in terms which are exactly those which might have been used to express his revolt and his fascination:

Je l'écoute faisant de l'infamie une gloire, de la cruauté un charme. "Je suis de race lointaine: mes pères étaient Scandinaves: ils se perçaient les côtes, buvaient leur sang—Je me ferai des entailles partout le corps, je me tatouerai, je veux devenir hideux comme un Mongol: tu verras, je hurlerai dans les rues. Je veux devenir fou de rage. Ne me montre jamais les bijoux, je ramperais et me tordrais sur le tapis. Ma richesse, je la voudrais tachée de sang partout.

Jamais je ne travaillerai. . . ." Oh! ces jours où il veut marcher avec l'air du crime.

Parfois il parle, en une façon de patois attendri, de la mort qui fait repentir, des malheureux qui existent certainement, des travaux pénibles, des départs qui déchirent les cœurs. Dans les bouges où nous nous enivrons, il pleurait en considérant ceux qui nous entouraient, bétail de la misère. Il relevait les ivrognes dans les rues noires. Il avait la pitié d'une mère méchante pour les petits enfants. Il s'en allait avec des gentillesse de petite fille au catéchisme. Il feignait d'être éclairé sur tout, commerce, art, médecine—Je le suivais, il le faut.

That is a reflection of the earliest Rimbaud, altruistic, enlightened, filled with sane ambitions, with yet, at bottom, an inherent savagery. Then he speaks of his art, of *Les Illuminations* perhaps, in which he bodied forth the qualities of his Demon:

Je voyais tout le décor dont, en esprit, il s'entourait; vêtements, draps, meubles: je lui prêtais des armes, une autre figure. Je voyais tout ce qui le touchait, comme il aurait voulu le créer pour lui.

We see that he really was in quest of the Beyond-Man:

Jamais homme n'eût pareil vœu. Je reconnaissais—sans craindre pour lui—qu'il pouvait être un sérieux danger dans la société—Il a peut-être des secrets pour changer la vie? Non, il ne fait qu'en chercher, me repliquais-je.

Then he confesses that he is at the mercy of his Demon, his inspiration, and he is anxious at the thought that this companion may desert him. He has the habit of their exquisite communion, but what can the Demon want with his pale and timid life? He will surely leave him, to take his message to others. But sometimes he forgets his misery in the hope that He will make him strong and enable him to realize his desire for liberty and freedom from obligations, to roam unchecked the face of the earth, "Oh! la vie d'aventures qui existe dans les livres des enfants, pour me récompenser, j'ai tant souffert, me la donnera-t-il?"

He cannot. Rimbaud concludes, "I do not know his aim."

A moi. L'histoire d'une de mes folies.

J'ai essayé d'inventer de nouvelles fleurs, de nouveaux astres, de nouvelles chairs, de nouvelles langues.

Alchimie du Verbe, as we understand it, describes the attempt to raise words above their natural capacity, like

the old alchemists who raised the base metals to the noble state of gold; to make words creative, to create a mood, not to discourse of one. For if a poet is not a maker, he is a mere purveyor of rhymed prose. In thus insisting that a work is poetic in virtue of its feeling, and not in virtue of its form, Rimbaud was merely stating a truth of which the best critics have always been aware. It is a truth which has to be continually restated as the pedants and professional critics and academicians hedge about the creative faculty with talk of precedents and reputations. It is a truth which the rebels and unreal talents equally abuse. For a time Rimbaud denied that form was an essential, but he admitted his error, only reminding us that it has to be reborn along with the emotion, "c'est aussi simple qu'une phrase musical."

The ambition described in this second *Délire* obviously dates from the moment of his extreme arrogance, from the time in the middle of 1871 when he dismissed the whole of modern literature as a bulk which disgusted him:

Je trouvais dérisoires les célébrités de la peinture¹ et la poésie moderne.

He became absorbed in all the despised forms of expression, the old-fashioned, the erotic, the popular, the childish. He shed the acquisitions of education in order to touch more closely sensations at their origin. He believed in the possibilities of irrational happenings. He invented the colours of the vowels.

He congratulated himself that he had invented a poetic technique which would, by means of representative sonorities, by a kind of quintuple onomatopoeia, work

¹ Verlaine said that he was bitterly disappointed (and so, being Rimbaud, furious or sarcastic) when he was shown the pictures in the Louvre.

directly on the senses. He tried his new tool by attempting to create the impression of silence and describing darkness.

He took a further step, habituating himself to simple hallucination, seeing a mosque in place of a factory, a drawing-room at the bottom of the lake. To describe these illusions he was obliged to attain to a similar state of vision in relation to the language, to substitute one word for another. He ended by adoring the confusion of his mind. He envied the unconsciousness of animals, identified himself with the fly, a morsel of unconscious ecstasy, and sang his farewells to the world.

This is the crisis which we referred to in his biography as taking place at Paris about May or June 1872. The songs are included in different versions in *Les Illuminations*, but it will be seen that he cared for them enough still to print them here. Perhaps he tolerated them only because they are so remote, in their faint echos, from the grand manner.

He said farewell to the world and then, but only then, he was absorbed, when he had stripped away the blue, the illusion of the senses, without hindrance into the radiance of Nature:

Enfin ; ô bonheur, ô raison, j'écartai du ciel l'azur, qui est du noir, et je vécus, étincelle d'or de la lumière *nature*.

And with half-ironical appreciation he quotes the limpid *Eternité*.

This triumph was short-lived. Terror came upon him, the terror which comes when we leave the world of Number and peer into the gulf over which that fragile scaffolding has been flung. He dared lose himself no longer in contemplation; he experienced that physical remorse which follows the trance, and he was obliged to travel to shake off his hallucinations by vigorous action. " Sur la mer, que j'aimais comme si

elle eût dû me laver d'une souillure, je voyais se lever la croix consolatrice."

That brings him up against the same dead-end as before, only this time it is within himself; he was damned by the hope of entire happiness, of salvation.

Then he sings his swan-song:

O saisons, ô châteaux
Quelle âme est sans défauts ?

And concludes:

Cela c'est passé. Je sais aujourd'hui saluer la beauté,¹

a clear opposition to his "Je finis par trouver sacré le désordre de mon esprit," and an abandonment of the nihilism to which his hallucinations had led.

In the next prose poem, *L'Impossible*, he sees more clearly into his position:

Ah, cette vie de mon enfance, la grande route par tous les temps, sobre surnaturellement, plus désintéressé que le meilleur des mendiants, fier de n'avoir ni pays, ni amis, *quelle sottise c'était.*

He had not realized soon enough that it was the Edenic purity to which he had been aspiring, where there is no toil and no shame. "Il paraît que c'était une rêve de paresse grossière," he says, bitterly ironical.

All his revolt, and the misery which came from it, were due to his not having perceived that he was living in the West, in the modern world, and he submits his spirit

¹ This at first sight appears a magnificent retraction. From a study of the rough draft it appears possible that it is an immense irony. Certainly he does not salute Beauty in his surviving letters. But here, as in the whole of *Une Saison*, we must remember his reply to his mother when she asked him what it was all about: "J'ai voulu dire ce que ça dit, littéralement et dans tous les sens." In case it is meant sincerely he may have suffered another revolt between the date of writing it and his settlement in Africa.

to the burden of all the cruel developments the spirit has undergone since the end of the Eastern or pagan world.

Then suddenly, in *L'Eclair*, the weight of the saying he had heard unheedingly in childhood falls on him. "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread." It lights up the darkness in which he has been struggling. But he still questions, can work bring about his salvation?

Le travail paraît trop léger à mon orgueil.

None the less, in *Matin*, he has accepted this burden. He remembers the glory of his youth, the gold-leaved certificates of merit. He greets the dawn, the gates of hell fall back, and the world opens before him:

Quand irons-nous, par delà les grèves et les monts, saluer la naissance du travail nouveau, la sagesse nouvelle, la fuite des tyrans et des démons, la fin de la superstition, adorer—les premiers!—Noël sur la terre!

Le chant des cieux, la marche des peuples! Esclaves, ne maudissons pas la vie.

In the last poem there is a final struggle, this time between his desire to live like a simple and honourable man and his pride in his genius. It is a real struggle, I could believe the sweat stood out on his face as he wrote

Moi! moi qui me suis dit mage ou ange, dispensé de toute morale, je suis rendu au sol, avec un devoir à chercher, et la réalité rugueuse à étreindre! Paysan!

Mais pas une main aime! et où puiser le secours?

Oui, l'heure nouvelle est au moins très sévère. . . .

Point de cantiques; tenir le pas gagné. Dure nuit! le sang séché fume sur ma face. . . .

It is, however, he sees, a matter of only a moment's patience. And he enjoins himself with a poignant promise, "Recevons tous les influx de vigueur et de tendresse réelle. Et, à l'aurore, armé d'une ardente patience, nous entrerons aux splendides villes."

But we must guard against thinking that since he came in like a lamb with *Les Etrennes des Orphelins* he went out like one too. At the last moment he recalls something he had said about a helping hand:

Que parlais-je de main amie ! Un bel avantage, c'est que je puis rire des vieilles amours mensongères, et frapper de honte ces couples menteurs—j'ai vu l'enfer des femmes là-bas ; et il me sera loisible de *posséder la vérité dans une âme et un corps*.

Such is the mere outline of one of the strangest books of the century, in which all the resources of prose are exploited and extended in order to bare his mind, to embody his ideas, not to adorn them. That is the secret of its uncompromising beauty.

He never added nor took away from that last statement which is the expression of his unqualified egoism. Whilst he was aggressive he at least recognized the passions of others; now his indifference is complete. And he never went back on his word. He became as self-sufficient as it is possible for a physical creature to become—even in his projects of marriage there is no question of affection, it is simply a means of prolonging his personality through a son—an extension of egoism.

There is a Protestant beauty in this unswerving purpose, a one-sided beauty such as attaches to strength irrespective of the use to which it is put. He is like a Hercules all of muscles, and certainly in the integrity with which he lived the life he chose, and his refusal to exploit a gift which was only part of his nature, he has the qualities of a hero. Had he stayed in Paris he might have enjoyed a great reputation. By going to Africa he gained a still greater reputation and his figure became legendary. He had not calculated on either.

XVII

THE WRITER

J'ai tous les talents.

THE growth of Rimbaud's style follows a course exactly opposite that of a writer like Swinburne. As the latter after his glorious youth brought more and more magnificence of rhythm and diction to the development of ever more minute cerebrations, Rimbaud shed rapidly the inessentials of the phrase and attempted an always more extreme synthesis. Compare, for instance, the superb amplification of farewell in the last three stanzas of *Bateau Ivre* with this *Départ* from *Les Illuminations*, in which the melody of the verse-form has been absorbed to allow an internal harmony which will not hamper the expression:

Assez vu. La vision s'est rencontrée à tous les airs.

Assez eu. Rumeurs des villes, le soir, et au soleil, et toujours.

Assez connu. Les arrêts de la vie.—O Rumeurs et Visions!

Départ dans l'affection et le bruit neufs.

Many of the phrases of *Une Saison en Enfer* are equally laconic, but he did not confine himself to that manner. He employs all the tones and all the shades of colour there, and in the brief visions which intersperse it there is noticeable a greater economy than in most of those in *Les Illuminations*, and none is more amplified. This restriction of the aesthetic parts of expression is consistent with the development of an artist, but it much more closely resembles an intellectual and moral matur-

ing. For as a writer Rimbaud, I believe, was born perfect, and all his writing is the outcome of a moral struggle. For it is possible to say that his last writings are not better than his first; they are appropriate to his intention, and that is all—that is the measure of literary perfection. But so are his first essays. At the age of nine, when he is faced with the necessity of learning Greek and Latin, he complains: “*Quel mal leur ai-je fait pour qu’ils me flanquent au supplice?*” just as in the *Saison* he laments his punishment for crimes of which he is innocent.

Such, then, is the necessity which inclines all those who write about Rimbaud to devote the greater part of their attention to his moral nature. The latter poems, of course, embody a richer experience, but that is not, in itself, an aesthetic development.

As a poet he has two or three poems which rank with the finest in the French language, and many which hold their heads up well in the anthology. But as a prose-writer he is unique and unmatched in his vein.

We have quoted from his early prose in his biography. But its remarkable qualities are the outcome of his extreme perceptive delicacy and receptivity. That is only as much as to say that an astonishing writer is a person of astonishing sensibility. To believe that poetic or imaginative writing may be produced by words without poetic or imaginative feelings is to contradict the whole example of Rimbaud. Only too many writers have outlived their poetic sensibility but not their mechanical agility.

Compression is not in itself a literary virtue. But it served his purpose to compress and so he abandoned the verse-form. Even in his poems in prose he never writes poetic prose in the manner of the ample romantic orators. He is a master of the phrase, not of the period, which indeed he hardly ever constructs. It is phrases

which stand out from his work with the finality of lines of verse:

Un envol de pigeons écarlates tonne autour de ma pensée.

Or:

Une mer troublée par la naissance éternelle de Vénus.

It is as though the idea had taken hold of the words and moulded them to its exact form. And the perception of the child was equally acute. At the age of nine he wrote of his father and mother:

Il était d'un caractère vif, bouillant, souvent en colère et ne voulant rien souffrir qui lui déplût.

Ma mère était bien différente : femme douce, calme, s'effrayant de peu de chose, et cependant tenant la maison dans un ordre parfait. *Elle était si calme que mon père l'amusait comme une jeune demoiselle.*

As a boy of fifteen he wrote of a girl's mouth:

Que la mienne saisisse comme une petite vague désespérée, minant sans fin quelque chose.

Passing the wealthy stores of *Les Illuminations*, we remain astounded before the phrases in *Une Saison en Enfer* which clamour for quotation. That little book and *Bateau Ivre* are the definitive achievements of his genius; the rest, and there is plenty of it, broadens the base of his fame without raising it. But even in the *Saison* I do not think there is a more remarkable phrase than that

J'étais dans son âme comme dans un palais qu'on a vidé pour ne pas voir une personne si peu noble que vous.

Perhaps the internal accords are a trifle too rich in this sentence, but the expression is admirably just:

Je n'aurai pas eu les tourments de l'âme presque morte au bien, où remonte la lumière sévère comme les cièrges funéraires.

In the *Saison*, too, are many of those rugged sarcasms characteristic of his temperament:

Les femmes soignent ces féroces infirmes retour des pays chauds.

Or this:

Pour le corps et pour l'âme—le viatique—on a la médecine et la philosophie—les remèdes de bonnes femmes et les chansons populaires arrangées.

No, there was not much that he could not do with prose. He was too nervously impatient to write sustained descriptions, though that it was not beyond him this passage from the abandoned prologue to the *Saison* may demonstrate. It is a poem which, because of its equivocal position, may be unjustly neglected:

Il y avait un jour, de février, mars ou avril, où le soleil de deux heures après midi laissait s'étaler une grande faulx de lumière sur l'eau ensevelie ; et comme là-bas, loin derrière les infirmes, j'aurais pu voir tout ce que ce rayon seul éveillait de bourgeons et de cristaux et de vers, dans ce lavoir, pareil à un ange blanc couché sur le côté, tous les réflets infiniment pâles remuaient.

That view of the lowering sunlight on the pool is only one example of the many fresh observations, both pictorial and psychological, which he introduced into literature. Our quotations are full of them, and there is not one which is not expressed with the inevitability of great writing.

Purely literary criticism would seem impertinent, since unless one is bi-lingual it is impossible to appreciate the complex perfections of another language. A brief note on the early history of Rimbaud's fame will help to make it clear how he came to be at first regarded as a freak writer.

Such a view could hardly be more flatly contradicted than by an examination of the rough drafts of parts of

Une Saison en Enfer with the finished text.¹ Here are parallel passages from *L'Alchimie du Verbe*:

Je réfléchis au bonheur des bêtes; les chenilles étaient les foules sans nom, les petits corps blancs des limbes: l'araignée romantique² envahie par l'aube opale; la punaise, brune personne,³ attendait sa passionnée. Heureuse la taupe,⁴ sommeil de toute la virginité!

. . . j'enviais la félicité des bêtes—les chenilles, qui représentent l'innocence des limbes, les taupes, le sommeil de la virginité!

This is only one example of many in which we see him not trying to decorate his ideas, as an insincere writer would do, but to strip them of all the expressions that were merely fanciful or of secondary interest until one can say that his final version is the idea itself, which, with a word more or a word less, would not be at all the same thing.

His genius, then, withstood all the attacks made upon it by his exasperated vanity, and out of the struggle emerged stronger and simpler, with a real originality. It is not at all credible that his writing was automatic, except in so far as all creative work demands the hypnosis of certain centres of consciousness. He laboured in a normal way to bring his style more closely to the idea he wished to express, urged by a force which he recognized and could not deny.

BIOGRAPHY OF HIS WRITINGS AND REPUTATION

When Rimbaud left Paris for the last time, his creative work completed, at the end of 1873, he was just an infant prodigy who had turned out badly. He left

¹ "Nouvelle Revue Française," August 1914.

² Above the line, not crossed out: *faisait*.

³ Doubtful word.

⁴ Above the line: *les ours*.

nothing behind him but rancour and the reputation of having brought Verlaine to ruin. Of his poems there was the negligible juvenile piece buried in the files of the *Revue pour Tous*, and the piece *Les Corbeaux*, printed in the *Renaissance*. In addition, there were three copies of *Une Saison en Enfer* scattered among his one-time friends, and a number of manuscripts even more widely dispersed.

There is no doubt that the distortion of his legend was of great assistance in preserving his work till the times were ripe for its publication. For the first ten years of his posthumous life it lived only in the memory of those who had known him. His resurrection began in the early 'eighties, when he appears as *Arthur Cimber* in a novel by Félicien Champsaur, and there a portion of *Les Chercheuses de Poux* is quoted for the first time. Then Verlaine, released from prison and tired of schoolmastering, came back to Paris, and the personal interest revived. In 1881 he wrote to Valade asking for a copy of two of Rimbaud's poems: "*Vaisseau* [sic] *Ivre* et *Les Veilleurs*, ou, à leur défaut, un autre poème (1ère manière) de la même provenance." Two years later this request bore fruit in the enthusiastic study which he wrote and contributed to *Lutèce*, a little revue of the Latin Quarter, one of the many hundreds which sprang up in that fertile soil during the time the Symbolist battle was being fought. Besides that on Rimbaud, he wrote studies of Corbière and Mallarmé, then hardly known, and the three essays were collected and published as a *plaquette* by Vanier in 1884.¹ The young writers of the time, then exceptionally antagonistic to all that was represented by the Academy and the "successful" author, seized on this pamphlet as a banner of revolt.

¹ Four years later a new edition included Villiers de L'Isle Adam, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, and Verlaine himself as *Pauvre Lélian*. But it was the first edition which acted as a detonator.

Verlaine's quotations had been copious (in full—*Voyelles, Oraison du Soir, Les Assis, Les Effarés, Les Chercheuses de Poux, Bateau Ivre*), and his criticism was vigorous and sensible. But the amateurs of poetry naturally fixed their attention on what was *curious* in the new poet, and soon one would have thought he had written nothing but a sonnet on the colours of the vowels. In spite of Verlaine's contribution the demand for poems of Rimbaud far exceeded the supply. His figure was seized upon by the young militant poets who so unfortunately labelled themselves decadents, and they completed the misunderstanding of Rimbaud's work which other circumstances had begun. Ernest Raynaud makes this fact plain in his reminiscences of the period:¹

Pour répondre à la curiosité du public et rendre notre doctrine plus saisissable, nous avons tenté d'incarner en Arthur Rimbaud le type idéal du Decadent. On le disait disparu à jamais de notre horizon, retourné à l'état nature, roi d'une peuplade sauvage. Sa vie peu connue restait enveloppée de légendes.

Some of these young men adorned their reviews with faked poems of Rimbaud which exaggerated the peculiarities apparent in the poems Verlaine had quoted. One of the most gifted of these forgers was Laurent Tailhade, who admitted afterwards the deceit. His own poems, both the elegiac and the satiric, show what is probably the earliest influence of Rimbaud's verse.

The next publication was that of *Les Illuminations* by the literary and artistic review called *Vogue*, then edited by Gustave Kahn. This was in 1886, and though it increased the worship of his admirers, partly from snobbism no doubt, at being the first to appreciate this rare and obscure genius, it alienated him still farther, if that were possible, from the ordinary reader.

¹ *La Mêlée Symboliste*. 3 vols. Renaissance du Livre.

All assistance from biographical indications was of course lacking.

In 1891 Verlaine re-edited *Les Illuminations* added a few poems rediscovered in the interval, and this, together with *Une Saison en Enfer*, then first reprinted, was issued by Vanier, the foster-father of the new school.

In the meantime Rodolph Darzens had been active collecting material and assembling anecdotes, with the result that a volume called *Reliquaire* appeared in 1891, the year of Rimbaud's death. It consisted of a considerable number of poems by Rimbaud with which a few apocryphal ones were mixed. The introduction by Darzens expresses the sort of reputation Rimbaud had left behind in literary circles. This book, however, which was unauthorized, was the subject of a lawsuit and was suppressed.

In 1895 Verlaine edited the *Poésies Complètes* for Vanier. This was only complete for the moment.

About this time one of the young anarchic poets, Paterné Berrichon, whose name is now linked with that of Rimbaud, began to collect material for a biography. In 1897 his *Vie de Jean-Arthur Rimbaud* appeared and thinned out the flourishing romantic legends. This admirable biography was published by the *Mercure de France*. Locally, a very fully documented life of Rimbaud appeared at intervals in the *Revue d'Ardenne et d'Argonne* between 1896 and 1901. This was written by two prominent citizens of Charleville. It is very reliable as to facts, and though it has not been reprinted, all other biographers have made copious use of it.

In 1898 the *Mercure de France* published an edition of the poems arranged in an approximately chronological order by Berrichon and Delahaye. In this way the nature of Rimbaud's genius and its development were for the first time indicated. The lack of understanding

of Charles Maurras and Anatole France in their obituary notices was no longer possible. Rimbaud's reputation now began to develop on a genuine basis, and it was assisted by the charming memoir which Ernest Delahaye published in 1906. In this year, too, a number of poems were rediscovered, *Les Sœurs de Charité* and *Les Déserts de l'Amour* the more important, and published in a periodical.

Berrichon devoted himself heart and soul to the justification of Rimbaud's genius. In 1899 he edited the letters from Africa, and laid greater stress on Rimbaud's colonizing work than the facts seem to allow. He married the poet's sister and utilized her childhood's impressions for the biography of the first nineteen years of Rimbaud's life which the *Mercure de France* published in 1912. This revised impression is inferior in vitality to the first biography, and Rimbaud is made altogether too innocuous and altruistic. In the same year M. Claudel wrote an essay on Rimbaud which stands at the head of the new *Œuvres Complètes*, issued almost immediately by the *Mercure*. Here Claudel defined Rimbaud as "un mystic à l'état sauvage," which could hardly be bettered in itself, and his appreciation of the poet is such as only another poet could have written. No one has more frankly declared his debt to Rimbaud, not only in the literary, but in the spiritual, reckoning. It is to his reading of *Les Illuminations* that he attributes the decisive step in his return to the Faith. Others have trod the same path without finding that it leads to the same fold. None the less, the tribute to the spiritual fecundity of Rimbaud's influence is beyond controversy.

The unrelenting nature of Rimbaud's antagonism was further obscured in that edition by breaking up the chronological order of the previous one and relegating to an appendix most of the poems he wrote before

1871, nearly a third of his whole output in verse. Since then there has been a sumptuous complete edition in three volumes with portraits, in which Berrichon, the editor, returned to the absolute chronological order. Even this probably is not textually perfect, but the present criticism has been based on it.¹ In 1914 M. Jacques Rivière published extracts from a profound study, written from the metaphysical standpoint, in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* for July and August. This was intended to form an introduction to a volume consisting of rough drafts and letters covering the literary period of Rimbaud's life, of which this review had printed some most interesting discoveries (October 1912 and July 1914). This volume, unfortunately, has not yet appeared. Since 1914 another poem, *Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie*, has been found and included in the current edition.

Such is the gradual aggregation of Rimbaud's work. It would take a volume to trace all the references to it in the last thirty years. He has had the most profound influence of any poet since Baudelaire. Even if we burden him with the parentage of the Dada movement (which, looking at his work as a whole, we cannot justly do), he still remains as the poet whose scepticism broke down what faith could not pierce, the barriers of positivism. And the richness and stability of his creation and his unconquerable sincerity remain as an example which has not yet been realized at its true value. The emphasis has been laid too often on his difference from other writers. That is insignificant beside his conformity to the supreme tradition.

In 1920 M. Rivière said: "Je ne ferai pas grande difficulté, par moments, à le révéler comme le plus grand poète qui ait jamais existé." That "par moments" is necessary, but the same might be said of any

¹ Editions de la Banderolle, 1922.

poet, for none exercises his domination continually, and we have always to say in the end that he is the first poet in the world *for some things*.

Quite recently Rimbaud appeared again as a character in a novel,¹ and he was dismissed to the limbo from which the author had drawn him with a gesture of the respect one pays to a hero of one's childhood, of whom one is now a little ashamed. If he is no longer the mode among the most brilliant young men of letters, that is all the better for his genuine reputation.

On 21st July 1901 a bronze bust of Rimbaud was set up in the station square at Charleville, to the accompaniment of the municipal band, the speeches of the Mayor and of a number of men of letters from Paris, and finally in the person of M. le Préfet des Ardennes, the salutation of the Republic. This seeming paradox is not to be explained by the conversion of the bourgeois whom Rimbaud outraged with a thoroughness not easily forgiven, but by two facts. Firstly, the expense of the statue was borne by a fund raised by Berrichon among Rimbaud's admirers, and secondly the fact that he was a poet and the nature of his poetry was kept carefully in the background. He was set up before the young Carropolitans not as a visionary, but as a pioneer whose unflagging industry opened up new markets for the manufactures of the Republic. The Mayor's speech was undoubtedly a model of diplomacy. He congratulated the citizens on having revenged themselves on the sarcastic poet by thus accepting the gift of his bust. He then hastened to recall the brilliant schoolboy who gained the highest prizes in the Concours académique and who, in some pretty pieces of verse, had paid for his eccentricities by standing out as the champion of the weak and the oppressed, the soft-

¹ As *Arthur*, in the first two chapters of *Anicet* by Louis Aragon. "Nouvelle Revue Française," 1921.

hearted defender of the little ones. His voice gained confidence as he proceeded to praise the explorer who, whilst assuring himself a good position, helped to make France beloved in East Africa and prepared the way for fruitful alliances.

And, most strangely, those banal words are true. The poet had become a merchant. Rimbaud himself, so normal had he become when separated from his demon, would have agreed with the bourgeois. Like them he came to believe that his imaginative work was a weakness which he could not do enough to live down.

The Germans, either in their mania for culture or their need of shells, removed the bronze bust during their occupation from 1914 to 1918. This is a rare instance of divine justice, for Rimbaud, least of all poets, is fitted for public honours. It was his doctrine and his example that there is no place but hell for the real poet in modern life. Any form of success must be based on compromise, a stain on the purity of perception. It is because of his refusal to accept the glory which the world was willing to bestow before he died, and which he believed to be base, that we see the nobility of his tormented life.

XVIII

THE POET

C'est un démon, vous savez, ce n'est pas un homme.

IN spite of the continual fascination of Rimbaud's work it has not what the newspapers call a strong human interest. It is doubtful if from *Bateau Ivre* onwards it has any interest at all in the newspaper sense. He should have been a character in the fifth part of *Back to Methuselah*, one of those who have passed through the human passions in the embryonic stage, represented by his life previous to his sixtieth year. Of wine, women, and song he had as poor an appreciation as Mr. Shaw. In these early poems there are certain conventional themes, perceived in his own way, but still with a resemblance to the desires of the mass of men—patriotism, political enthusiasm, the enjoyment of women. These he quickly and splendidly exhausted. The sentiments he deliberately suppressed, and so naturally he did not write about them. Love, in the *chevaleresque* sense, he ignored entirely, and he does not seem to have been devoted in his friendships. Not only those who had helped him, like Izambard, or those who had quarrelled with him, but the friends with whom he had passed long periods of companionship, Delahaye, J. L. Forain, Verlaine, Nouveau, were dropped without compunction or regret. When in Africa he wanted some map-making instruments bought for him, a commission rather beyond his family's capacity, he remembered Delahaye. He wrote him a long letter of directions with a purely conventional heading and conclusion, and to complete the insult he addressed him by

the wrong Christian name. "Appréciations sans vertige l'étendue de mon innocence," he cries.

Innocence or sophistication is here the same thing. No one keeps a friend longer than he has need of him, if only the need of his friendship. Rimbaud dispensed with even that. What he sought when he broke out from his human shell was the means with which to sustain himself in the condition of transcendent purity, of god-like disillusionment in which he emerged. It is for this reason that the cries in *Les Illuminations* touch few heart-strings. They are cries for the power to continue. Like Marlowe's *Faustus*, it is a book which may move only a few, but for those it is one of the greatest of all books. He is a Faustus who has excluded from his soul not only the grace of heaven, but of home, and for no Helen's kiss:

O thou art fairer than the evening air
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars.

The wonder and the tragedy of it is that he will have no Helen but an Athene sprung divinely militant from his own brain. This is the "Mother of Beauty" of *Being Beauteous*, the Helène of *Fairy*, the "Son of Light" of *Vagabonds*, and all the other visions of power in *Les Illuminations*.¹

Pride or chastity, he recedes from contact with all that we value or pursue. He scorns the highest satisfactions of our world.

He was a demon, that is, nothing either bad or good, but a spirit or metaphysical hypothesis, above the laws of men and below the power of divinity. And this condition was induced in him, I think, by the precocity

¹ Rimbaud discovered our own poetry too late for it to suggest a means of aesthetic salvation. It is significant that one of the intensest visions should have the English title *Being Beauteous*. Another, *Bottom*, recalls *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. But it was too late.

of his intellectual maturity, the habit of slave-driving his intellect which his mother taught him, and the poverty of his early emotional life. His mind outstripped his experience, and so built out of abstract words the idea of absolute satisfaction which lured his boyish genius into the abyss of disgust. Could he have accepted some small corner of life as material for his art on whatever terms, I do not see his peer in the century. But then he would not have been Rimbaud, who based his genius on this refusal.

What superb blindness, what magnificent folly in that absolute egoism. What saintly ignorance! Finally, how poignant an avowal: "La musique savante manque à notre désir."

Although *Une Saison en Enfer* is a public abnegation of his present hopes of superhuman power and delight, it is still a refusal to submit to the condition which alone differentiates a human city from a colony of prairie-dogs, slight as that difference may seem. He persists in his folly, submitting only to the law of work; that of charity is refused. So, if theology really were serious, as he said it was, and this were a play, it should not end with Rimbaud's promise to enter into splendid towns, but with thunder and lightning and that explicit stage-direction: "Exeunt Devils with Faustus."

The extravagance of Rimbaud's revolt obscures to some extent the fertility of the seed he flung down after that harsh ploughing. His own genius, his own happiness, and his own career were spent and mortgaged in the three years of which his work is the faithful imprint.

Indeed, the story of his life is not one to tempt the amateur of poetics to imitation. He was truly damned by his ambition and by his temperament, and his last years might have been described as a sojourn in hell no less than his first. There is a tragic sincerity in the avowal of his absolute scepticism, different from the

crude ancestor-slaughter of the once famous Futurists. His incapacity to accept the order of our world, which was the cause of his suffering, was an organic inability which he never overcame. Only in Africa where he was almost like a demon among men, since his technical knowledge and integrity raised him far above the natives, he might have seemed to be in his proper element—yet even there, what furious complainings in his letters! He was the exception among men, as he was among writers.

There is the germ of a religion in Rimbaud, in the stoicism and self-exploitation of the lyrical *Eternité*, for instance. It would be a hard, uncompromising religion, holding out no hopes of a hereafter like the houris and rose-gardens promised in "the bastard wisdom of the Koran," but consume life fiercely and unregretfully. In refusing the hope of an easeful Paradise he is un-human, but the same might be said of Shelley or of Blake. All the great visionary poets have been more than human in their moral strength and their demoniac fury of self-belief. Their visions, charged with the magnetism of language, effect a change in our baser sensibilities. Rimbaud scrapes the rust of complacency from the mind, and mirrors, in his lucid phrases, the incarnation of human energy itself: "Oh nos os sont revêtus d'un nouveau corps amoureux." Absurd as that promise may seem in isolation, there is hardly another poet, certainly no other French poet, whose work so consistently and magnetically reveals the power of the human spirit in its intense purity. In the great literature of his country that spirit is shown most richly in the thousand reactions of society, most rarely in its ultimate and infrangible solitude. The arrogant complacency of man in the ordering of impulse is abashed before his unhesitating answer to the calls of his nature. And that infinite escape was contrived by a schoolboy tormented by the thousand tediums of home.

Such an example of the freedom of the spirit from the forces of inertia and docility which constantly besiege it is not, we may be sure, unique in modern life. But never in ancient or modern times has that struggle been more clearly expressed than in Rimbaud's poems, in his lifelong integrity and in his silence.

THE END

APPENDIX
TRANSLATIONS

APPENDIX

TRANSLATIONS

SENSATION

ON summer evenings blue, where ears of wheat
Peck at you, I shall pass and spare grass tread—
Dreaming, shall feel its freshness round my feet,
And let the wind keep bathing my bare head.

I shall not speak, nought shall I think about,
But infinite love will flood my whole soul through;
Far I shall wander, gipsy-like far out
In Nature; happy as with a woman too.

T. STURGE MOORE.

Early 1870.

THE POET AS VISIONARY

Charleville, 15th May 1871.

I HAVE decided to give you an hour of the new literature.

I begin at once with a modern psalm.

(*Chant de guerre parisien.*)

Here is some prose on the future of poetry.

All the poetry of antiquity culminated in Greek poetry—the harmonious Life. From Greece to the romantic movement—middle-ages—there are men of letters and versifiers. From Ennius to Theroldus, from Theroldus to Casimir Delavigne, the whole lot is rhymed prose, a game of skill, the deliquescence and glory of innumerable idiotic generations. Racine is the pure, strong, and great.—If someone had blown on his rhymes and jumbled up his cesuras the Divine Sot would be as unknown to-day as the first-comer to write an *Origins*. After Racine, the game grew stale. It has lasted two thousand years! . . .

[*Passage omitted.*]

No one has ever judged romanticism properly. Who was there to judge it? The Critics!! The Romantics? They who prove plainly that the song is so seldom the work, that is the thought, sung and understood of the singer.

For *I* is *some one else*. If brass wakes up as a bugle, it is no merit of its own. That is obvious to me: I am present at the hatching of my thought: I watch it; I listen to it; I make a sweep of the bow: the symphony stirs in the depths or leaps at a bound on the stage.

If the old idiots had not discovered only the false meaning of *Me*, we should not have to sweep up the millions of skeletons who for an infinite time have

collected the products of their squinting brains, proclaiming themselves its authors!

In Greece, I have said, verse and music, rhythms: Action. Later on, music and rhyming became pastimes, relaxations. The study of this past delights the curious: numbers enjoy reviving these antiquities:—that's their game. The universal intelligence has always thrown out its ideas naturally; men have gathered up some of these fruits of the brain: they acted accordingly, they wrote books of them: such was the process, man not cultivating himself, being not yet awake or not yet in the fulness of the great dream. Functionaries, writers. Author, creator, poet, that man has never lived!

The first study of the man who wishes to be a poet is knowledge of himself, wholly. He searches his soul, he examines it, he tries it, he learns it. When he knows it he should cultivate it: that seems obvious: in every brain a natural development takes place; so many *egoists* call themselves authors; there are plenty of others who attribute their intellectual progress to themselves! But it is a matter of making the soul monstrous: like the *comprachios*, eh! Imagine a man setting warts on his face and cultivating them.

I say that one must be a *visionary* (*voyant*), make oneself a *VISIONARY*. The Poet makes himself a *visionary* by a long immense and reasoned *derangement* of *all the senses*. He seeks in himself every kind of love, of suffering, of madness, he exhausts all the poisons in himself in order to keep only their quintessences. Unspeakable torment, in which he has need of all faith, all super-human power, in which he becomes among all the great Sick Man, the great Criminal, the great Damned—the supreme Scholar!—For he comes to the *unknown*! Since he has cultivated his soul, already more rich than anyone else's! He comes to the Unknown; and when, maddened, he ends by losing con-

sciousness of his visions, he has seen them! Though he collapses in his leaping among things unheard-of and nameless: other horrible labourers will come; they will begin at the horizons where the other sank.

[*Continued in six minutes.*]

Here I interpose a second psalm, hors du texte: lend me a complacent ear and everyone will be delighted.—I have the bow in my hand, I begin:

Mes petites amoureuses.

There. And notice especially that, if I were not afraid of making you pay out more than 60cs. postage, me poor starveling who, for seven months have not handled a single copper coin! I would let you have my *Amants de Paris*, a hundred hexameters, Sir, and my *Mort de Paris*, two hundred hexameters.

I begin again:

Then the poet is truly Thief of fire.

He is charged with humanity, with the animals even; he must make his discoveries to be felt, touched, heard. If that which he brings back from *down there* has form, he gives form; if it is formless he gives formlessness. To find a language.

[*Passage omitted.*]

This language will be of the soul for the soul, inclusive of everything, scents, sounds, colours, thought hooking thought and drawing it on. The poet should define the amount of the unknown awakening in his time, in the universal soul; he should give more than the formula of his thoughts, than the notes of *his march to Progress*! Enormity becoming normal, absorbed by everybody, he would be really a *multiplier of progress*!

This future will be materialistic, you see. Always full of *Number* and *Harmony*, poems will be made to last.—At bottom, this should have in it again something of Greek poetry.

Eternal art will have its functions, as the poets are

citizens. Poetry will no longer sing of action; *it will be in advance.*

There will be such poets! When the infinite servitude of woman shall be broken, when she lives for herself and by herself, man, until now detestable,—having given her her dismissal, she will be a poet, she too! Woman will find some of the unknown. Are her worlds of ideas different from ours? She will find strange unfathomable things, repulsive, delicious; we shall take them, we shall understand them.

Whilst we are waiting demand from the poet the *new*,—ideas and forms. All the clever people believe that they have satisfied this condition:—that is not it. . . .

The first Romantics were visionaries without too well accounting to themselves for it: the cultivation of their souls was accidentally begun: empty, but stoked-up railway engines which sometimes strike the rails.—Lamartine is sometimes a visionary, but strangled by the antique form.—Hugo, huge vulgarian, has much of the SEEN in the later volumes: *les Misérables* is a true poem. I have *les Châtiments* in hand; *Stella* gives pretty nearly the extent of the *sight* of Hugo. Too much Belmontet and Lammenais, of Jehovahs and columns, old broken down monstrosities.

Musset is fourteen times hateful to us, anguished generations in the grip of visions—insulted by his angelic idleness! Oh! the fusty tales and proverbs! oh the *Nuits*! oh *Rolla*, oh *Namouna*, oh *la Coupe*! . . .

[*A lengthy indictment of Musset is omitted.*]

The second romantics are very *visionary*: Théophile Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, Théodore de Banville. But to examine the unseen and to listen to the un-heard being another matter than bringing back the spirit of dead things, Baudelaire is the first of *visionaries*, king of poets, a *true God*. He again lived in surroundings which were too artistic; and the form so praised in him

is tawdry. The inventions of the unknown demand new forms.

Broken with the old forms: among the innocents, A. Renaud,—has done his “Rolla,”—L. Grandet,—has done his “Rolla”;—the Gauls and the Mussets, G. Lafenestre, Coran, C.-L. Popelin, Soulayr, L. Salles; the schoolboys, Marc, Aicard, Theuriet; the dead and the imbeciles, Autran, Barbier, L. Pichat, Lemoyne, the Deschamps, the Des Essarts; the journalists, L. Cladel, Robert Luzarches, X. de Ricard; the fantaisistes, C. Mendès; the bohemians; the women; the talents, Léon Dierx and Sully-Prudhomme, Coppée.—The new school, called parnassian, has two visionaries, Albert Mérat and Paul Verlaine, a true poet.—There. So I work to make myself a *visionary*.—And let us finish with a pious hymn:

Accroupissements.

You would be vile not to answer: quick, for in six days I shall be in Paris, perhaps.

Au revoir.

A. RIMBAUD.

STANZAS FROM *BATEAU IVRE*

As I was descending impassive Streams
I felt no longer guided by the tows-men,
squalling Redskins had taken them for targets
and nailed them, naked, to painted stakes.

I cared no more for any sort of ship,
bearer of Flemish corn or English cottons.
When with my guides the racket had died down
at the stream's will I drifted where I wished.

* * * *

And I have since, bathed in the poem Sea
milky with the infusion of the stars,
devoured its glaucous spaces where, pale wreck,
a drowned man rapt and pensive sometimes falls.

* * * *

I followed for whole months the maddened waves
like rabid herds at the assault of cliffs,
not dreaming that the Virgins' shining feet
might force a muzzle on these snorting Seas

I have brushed, you must know, such Floridas
as none believe in, where the flowers are mingled
with eyes of man-skinned panthers and where rainbows
hang under sea like reins to glaucous flocks.

I have seen bubbling marshes, huge fish-baskets
where in the reeds a whole Leviathan rots.
Ruins of waters in the midst of calms,
and the distances cascading to the gulfs.

Glaciers, silver suns and rainbow waves
and fearful strandings deep in dusky bays,
where under red-hot skies huge serpents droop
bug-eaten from trees twisted with black scents.

* * * *

So I, lost boat beneath the hair of creeks,
flung by the tempest into birdless ether;
I whom no Monitor or Hansa schooner
would have fished up the carcass drunk with water,

free, fuming, risen out of purple mists
who bored the sky that, ruddy as a wall,
bears the good poets' exquisite conserve,
moss of the sunlight, dribblings of the blue.

who trembled, hearing fifty leagues away,
the rut of Behemoths and Maelstroms grind,
eternal threader of the blue serene,
I regret Europe of the ancient walls.

* * * *

I have seen star-archipelagoes and isles
whose madding skies lie open to the wanderer,
do you sleep self-exiled in those endless nights
Oh countless golden birds, Oh future Vigour?

I have truly wept too much. Dawns break the heart,
moonlight is vile and bitter every sun.
Harsh love with raptest torpors bloated me.
May my pen splinter! May I take the sea!

I want no water of Europe but the cold
dark puddle a sad-hearted child squats by,
and launches out towards the scented dusk
a boat as frail as a May butterfly.

I can no longer, in your languor steeped,
Oh waves, pick up the cotton merchants' wake
nor yet confront the pride of flags and flames
nor float beneath the horrid eyes of hulks.

Late Summer 1871.

NOTE.—Rimbaud himself abandoned, in some of the later poems, the convention of beginning each line with a capital letter. He had not done so at the time of *Bateau Ivre*. I print it thus to show that, having neglected rhyme, this version cannot pretend to the formal perfection, even, of the original. Like those of my own which follow, it is intended merely to lead the reader to the works.

LES CHERCHEUSES DE POUX

WHEN, forehead full of torments hot and red,
The child invokes white clouds of hazy dreams,
Two sisters tall and sweet draw near his bed,
Whose fingers frail nails tip with silv'ry gleams.

The child before a window open wide,
Where blue air bathes a maze of flowers, they sit;
And in his heavy hair dew falls, while glide
Their fingers terrible with charm through it.

So hears he sing their breath a dread hush curbs;
How rich with rose and leafy sweets it is!
It sometimes a salival lisp disturbs
On the lip drawn back, or deep desires to kiss.

Through perfumed silences their lashes black
Beat slow; he hears in colourless dim drowse,
Trapped by their soft electric fingers, crack
"Twixt tyrant nails the death of each small louse.

Then wells in him the wine of idleness,
Delirious power, th' harmonica's soft sigh:
The child still feels to their long drawn caress
Ceaselessly heave and swoon a wish to cry.

T. STURGE MOORE

Late 1871.

PROSE POEMS FROM *LES ILLUMINATIONS*

VAGABONDS

PITIFUL brother! what atrocious nights I owe him! "I had not put myself whole-heartedly into this enterprise. I had taken advantage of his weakness. Through my fault we should return into exile, into slavery." He attributed to me a bad luck and an innocence very curious, and he added disquietening reasons.

I answered by sneering at this satanic expert, and in the end made my way to the window. I created, beyond the country traversed by bands of delicate music, phantoms of the nocturnal luxury to come.

After this vaguely hygienic distraction, I stretched myself on a mattress. And, almost every night, no sooner than asleep, poor brother got up, with his stinking mouth and starting eyes,—just as he dreamed himself!—and dragged me into the sitting-room howling his dream of idiotic grief.

I had indeed, in all sincerity of heart, undertaken to restore him to his primitive condition as a son of Light,—and we wandered, nourished with the wine of caverns and the traveller's biscuit, myself in haste to find the place and the formula.

SUNRISE

I have clasped the summer dawn.

Nothing stirred yet on the palace fronts. The water was dead. The legions of shadows had not left the forest road. And I walked, breathing out warm, swift clouds; and precious stones looked out and wings rose without sound.

The first adventure was, in the path already filled with cool, pale flashes, a flower which told me its name.

I laughed at the waterfall as it tangled its hair among the pine-trees: at the silvered peak I recognized the goddess.

Then I raised one by one her veils. In the lane, with a shaking of arms. On the plain, where I warned the cockerel of her presence. In the city she fled among the steeples and the domes; and, running like a beggar along the marble wharves, I chased her.

At the top of the road, near a wood of laurels, I gathered her within her heaped-up veils and I felt the touch of her vast body. The dawn and the child fell together to the bottom of the wood.

Wakening, it was noon.

ANGUISH

Is it possible that she might pardon me my ambitions continually quashed,—that a comfortable end makes up for ages of beggary,—that the hour of success dulls us to the shame of our fatal inability?

(O palms! diamond!—Love, strength!—higher than all joys and glories!—in every way,—everywhere, demon, god,—youth of this very creature: me!)

That the accidents of scientific magic and the progress of social fraternity should be cherished as successive restitutions of the primitive freedom? . . .

But the Vampire who makes us nice, orders us to amuse ourselves with that which she leaves us, or that otherwise we be more absurd.

Wallow in wounds, in the wearisome breeze and the sea: in torments, in the silence of murderous breeze and waters: in tortures which mock, in their hideously swelling silence.

AFTER THE FLOOD

As soon as the idea of the Flood had subsided,
A hare stopped among the saintfoins and the swaying
hair-bells, and said his prayer to the rainbow, through
the spider's web.

Oh! the precious stones which hid themselves,—the
flowers which looked out already.

In the dirty High Street, stalls were put up, and the
barges were drawn towards the sea shelved high above
as in engravings.

Blood flowed, at Bluebeard's,—in the slaughter-
houses, in the circuses, where God's seal paled the
windows. Blood and milk flowed.

The beavers built. The "mazagrans" smoked in the
coffee-bars. In the great house with panes still stream-
ing, children in mourning gazed at marvellous pictures.
A door slammed; and, in the village square, the child
turned his arms, followed by the wind-vanes and weather-
cocks all round, under the dazzling shower.

Madame * * * set up a piano in the Alps. The Mass
and the First Communions were celebrated at the
hundred thousand altars of the cathedral.

The caravans started out. And the Hôtel Splendide
was built in the chaotic, icy night of the Pole.

Since then, the Moon hears the jackals whining in the
wildernesses of thyme,—and the wooden-shoed pastor-
als grumbling in the orchard. Then, in the violet
budding forest, Eucharis told me that it was spring.

Rise, pools;—foam, flow over the bridge and pass
beyond the wood;—black sheets and organs, lightnings
and thunder, rise and flow;—waters and sorrows, rise
and bring back the floods. For since they have been
dispersed,—oh, the precious stones hiding themselves,
and the open flowers!—it is wearisome! And the

Queen, the Witch who lights her embers in the pot of earth, never wants to tell us that which she knows, and of which we are ignorant.

ANTIQUÉ

Gracious son of Pan! Around your brows garlanded with flowerlets and with bays, your eyes, those precious globes, revolve. Stained with russet lees, your cheeks sag. Your tusks glisten. Your chest is like a cithar, tinklings pass along your golden arms. Your heart beats in that belly where sleeps the double sex. Roam you, at night, moving softly that thigh, that second thigh and that left leg.

MYSTIC

On the slope of the precipice, angels turn their woollen dresses, in the steel and emerald herbage. Fields of flames leap up to the tip of the mount. To the left, the fallow of the crest is trampled by all the homicides and all the battles, and all the disastrous noises run their curve. Behind the crest on the right, the line of dawns, of progress. And, whilst the strip, at the top of the picture, is formed of the twisting and leaping murmur of sea-shells and of human nights, The flowered sweetness of the stars, and of the sky, and all the rest, comes down in front of the cliff, like a pannier, opposite us, and makes the abyss beneath a flowering blue.

TALE

A Prince was angry at having spent himself only in the perfecting of commonplace liberalities. He foresaw astonishing revolutions in love, and suspected his wives capable of more than that complaisance graced by heaven and by show. He wished to see truth, the hour of essential desire and satisfaction. Whether or not this was an aberration of piety, he wished it. He possessed at any rate a large enough human power.

All the women who had known him were slain: what riot in the garden of Beauty! Under the sword, they blessed him. He ordered no fresh ones.—Women appeared again.

He killed all those who followed him, after the hunt or libations.—Everyone followed him.

He amused himself cutting the throats of precious animals. He set palaces ablaze. He flung himself on people and hacked them in pieces. The crowd, golden buildings, fine beasts existed still. Could one reach ecstasy through destruction, through cruelty regain one's youth! The people did not complain. No one offered the benefit of his views.

One evening he was galloping proudly. A Genie appeared, of an ineffable, even inavowable, beauty. From his features and his bearing sprang the promise of a multiple and complex love! of an unspeakable even insupportable happiness! The Prince and the Genie destroyed one another probably in the state of essential health. How could they fail to die of it? Together then they died.

But this Prince passed away, in his palace, at an ordinary age. The Prince was the Genie. The Genie was the Prince.—There is no music fitting our desire.

ROYALTY

One fine morning, among a most amiable people, a splendid man and woman cried out in the public square: "My friends, I wish her to be queen!" "I wish to be queen!" She laughed and trembled. He spoke to friends of a revelation, of an ordeal that was ended. They swooned one against the other.

Indeed, they were kings a whole morning, when the crimson glow hung upon the houses, and all the afternoon, when they moved towards the palm-gardens.

BEING BEAUTEOUS

Against the snow, a Creature beautiful and tall. Hissings of death and dull vibrations of music make this adored body rise, swell, and tremble like a ghost; black and scarlet wounds break out in the superb flesh. The proper colours of life deepen, dance, and break loose around the vision—on the stocks. And the shudders rise and rumble, and the furious odour of these effects absorbing the deathly rattlings and raucous tones that the world, far behind us, darts at our mother of beauty, she recoils, she draws up. Oh! our bones are clad with an amorous new body.

O the ashen face, the horse-hair shield, the crystal arms! the cannon on which I must fling myself across the medley of trees and the limpid breeze.

LABOURERS

O that sultry February morning! The unseasonable south wind brought back memories of our ridiculous beggary, our youthful misery.

Henrika had a skirt of brown and white squared cotton, which must have been worn last century, a poke-bonnet and a silk scarf. It was more miserable than mourning. We took a walk in the suburbs. The sky was overcast and that south wind roused all the vile smells of the ravaged gardens and dried-up fields.

That could not have wearied my sweetheart to the same degree as myself. In a puddle left by a flood of the previous month she pointed out to me some tiny fish.

The town with its smoke and its noise of crafts followed us a long way into the fields, O the other world, the land blessed by heaven, and its shady places! The south wind reminded me of the miserable events of my childhood, my despairs in summer, the horrible amount of power and knowledge fate has always put out of my reach. No! we will not spend the summer in this miserly country where we shall never be anything but affianced orphans. I wish this hardened arm no longer to drag a beloved image.

NOTE.—After the successive disappointments of which we have spoken, and also, perhaps, in reaction from the exasperating, incessant, initiative demanded by the pretension of “being beauteous” (see the last paragraph of that poem) we find a series of valedictory statements leading up to the definitive *Adieu* at the end of *Une Saison en Enfer*. So much should make clear the meaning of this poem and the three which follow.

SALE

For sale that which the Jews have not sold, which neither nobility nor crime have relished, of which unholy love and the infernal honesty of the masses are ignorant! which neither the age nor science can perceive:

Re-united Voices; the fraternal awakening of all choral and orchestral energies and their instantaneous application! The unique opportunity to free our senses!

For sale Bodies without price, beyond any family, class, sex, descent! Riches jutting out at each pace! Sale of diamonds without controll!

For sale anarchy for the masses; irrepressible satisfaction for superior amateurs; atrocious death for the faithful and lovers!

For sale habitations and migrations, sports, fairylands and perfect comforts, and the noise, the bustle, and the future they make!

For sale applications of the calculus and unheard-of leaps of harmony. Lucky finds and terms not suspected, —immediate possession. Wild and infinite leap towards invisible splendours, insensible delights,—and its maddening secrets for each vice—and its frightful gaiety for the crowd.

For sale the bodies and the voices, the immense unquestionable opulence, that which one will never sell. The sellers are not at the end of their stock! The travellers need not hand in their deposits so soon.

LIVES

I

O the vast avenues of the holy land, the terraces of the temple! What have they done with the Brahman who explained to me the Proverbs? From down here I still see even the old women of that time! I remember hours of moonlight and of sunlight along the rivers, my companion's hand on my shoulder, and our caresses standing in the scorching plains.—A flight of scarlet pigeons thunders round my thought.—Exiled here, I have a stage on which to play the dramatic masterpieces of every literature. I would point out to you unheard-of

riches. I follow the history of treasures that you found. I see what is to come! My wisdom is as much disdained as chaos. What is my nothing beside the stupor which awaits you?

II

I am an inventor very differently deserving from all those who have preceded me; a musician even, who has found something like the key of love. At present, the lord of a barren countryside with a dusky sky, I attempt to rouse myself with the memory of my mendicant childhood, of the apprenticeship or the arrival in sabots, of the polemics, of five or six widowings, and of a few bridals where my steady head prevented me from rising to the pitch of my comrades. I do not regret my old part of divine gaiety: the sober air of this harsh land nourishes most actively my atrocious scepticism. But as this scepticism cannot henceforward be put into practice, and besides, I am involved in a new trouble,— I expect to become a very wretched idiot.

III

In a loft, where I was shut up at twelve years old, I experienced the world, I illustrated the human comedy. In a store-room I learnt history. At some night festival in a Northern city, I met all the women of the Old Masters. In an ancient passage in Paris they taught me the classic sciences. In a magnificent dwelling, circled by the entire East, I accomplished my vast work and passed my illustrious retirement. I have brewed my blood. My task is sent back to me. One must not even dream any more of that. I am really from beyond the tomb and no payments in advance.

DEPARTURE

Enough seen. The vision has been met in every way.
Enough had. Murmurs of towns, at evening, and in
sun and always.

Enough known. The summits of life.—O Murmurs
and Visions.

Departure in new sympathy amid new sounds.

FROM *UNE SAISON EN ENFER*

DÉLIRES I

*Foolish Virgin
The Infernal Bridegroom*

HEAR the confession of a companion in Hell:

“O holy Bridegroom, my Master, do not refuse the confession of the unhappiest of your servants. I am lost. I am drunken. I am unclean. Such a life!

Forgiveness, holy Lord, forgiveness! Ah! forgiveness! How many tears! And how many tears still to come, I trust!

In time to come I shall meet the heavenly Bridegroom! I was born his subject.—The other may beat me now! Just now, I am at the end of the world! O my friends! No, not my friends. Never such torments nor deliriums. . . . Is this foolish?

Ah! I am suffering, I cry out. I am truly suffering. Everything is permitted me though, since I am loaded with the contempt of the most contemptible hearts.

At least let us make this confession, though one is free to repeat it twenty other times—so drab, so insignificant! I am slave of the infernal Bridegroom, he who ruined the foolish virgins. It is certainly the same demon. It is not a ghost nor a phantasm. But I who have lost my virtue, who am damned and dead to the world, I shall not be killed! How can I describe him to you? I no longer know how to speak! I am in mourning, I weep, I am afraid. A little fresh air, Lord, if it is your wish, if it is really your wish!

I am a widow. . . . I was a widow . . . yes, I used to be

thoroughly right-minded once, and I was not born to become a bag of bones! . . . He was almost a child. . . . His strange delicacies seduced me. I have forgotten all my human ties to follow him. Such a life! It is not real life here. We are not in the world. I go where he goes, it must be so. And often he flies into a passion with me, *poor soul, me*. The Demon!—He is a demon, you understand, *he is not a man*.

He says: 'I am not fond of women. Love is to be re-invented, we know. They are only capable of wishing for a secure position. Once that is gained heart and beauty are put aside; nothing is left but cold disdain, the sustenance of marriage nowadays. Or else I see women with the signs of promise from whom *I* could have made good comrades exploited first of all by brutes as sensitive as a faggot. . . .'

I hear him making of infamy a glory, of cruelty an attraction. 'I am of a distant race: my fathers were Vikings: they used to pierce their sides and drink their blood. I will gash my body all over, I will tattoo myself. I want to become as hideous as a Mongol: you shall see, I will howl in the streets, I want to go mad with fury. Never show me jewels, I should grovel and writhe on the carpet. I want my splendour spattered all over with blood. I will never work.' Many nights, his demon seizing me, we wrestled together, I struggled against him. Certain nights, often drunk, he posts himself in the street or in a house, so as to scare me to death.—'They will certainly cut my throat; that will be disgusting.' Oh! those days when he wants to go about like a criminal!

Sometimes in a kind of gentle prattle he talks of death, which brings one to repent, of the unhappy who certainly exist, of painful labours, of partings which tear the heart. In the beer-shops where we used to get drunk he wept to think of those who surrounded us, Misery's

herds. He raised up drunkards out of the dark streets. He had the tenderness of an erring mother for little children. He would go about with the winsomeness of a little girl at catechism.—He pretended to be enlightened on everything, business, art, medicine.—I followed him, it had to be!

I saw all the scenery with which, in spirit, he surrounded himself; garments, drapery, furniture: I lent him weapons and another face. I saw all that which affected him, as he would have wished to create it for himself. When it seemed to me that his spirit was slack I followed him a long way in strange and complicated actions, good or evil: I was sure never to enter his world. By the side of his dear sleeping body what hours of the night I have watched, seeking why he wished so much to evade reality. No man had ever such a vow. I perceived, without fearing for him, that he might be a serious danger in the community.—He has perhaps secrets for *changing life*? No, he is only seeking them, I answered myself. In short his charity is bewitched and I am its prisoner. No other soul would have the strength,—strength of despair, to bear it, to be loved and protected by him. However, I never imagine him with another soul: One sees his Angel, never another's Angel,—I think. I was in his soul as in a palace that has been emptied so as to see no one so unworthy as yourself: that is all. Alas, he meant so much to me. But what could he want with my dim and timid life? He would not make me better, if he did not make me die. Miserably vexed, I said to him sometimes 'I understand you.' He shrugged his shoulders.

So, my grief unceasingly renewed and finding myself still further astray in my own eyes,—as in the eyes of all those who might have wished to regard me, had I not been condemned to be forgotten by everyone for ever! I hungered more and more for his favours. With

his kisses and friendly embraces it was certainly a heaven, a gloomy heaven, which I entered and where I would have wished to be left, poor, deaf, dumb, blind. Already I had caught the habit of it. I saw ourselves as two good children, free to walk about in the Paradise of sorrow. We agreed with one another. Deeply moved, we worked together. But after a profound caress he would say "How queer it will seem to you, when I am no longer there, this through which you have passed. When you will no longer have my arms under your neck, nor my breast on which to rest, nor this mouth on your eyes. Because I shall have to go away, very far, one day. Since I must help others: it is my duty. Though that will be hardly agreeable, dear heart." Suddenly I foresaw myself, him gone, the prey of giddiness, plunged into the most fearful darkness: death. I made him promise that he would never abandon me. He gave it me twenty times, that lovers' promise. It was as worthless as my saying to him 'I understand you.'

Ah! I have never been jealous of him. I do not believe that he will leave me. What will become of us? He has not an acquaintance; he will never work. He wants to live as a somnambulist. Will simply his goodness and kindness give him a place in the real world? At moments I forget the pity where I have fallen; he will make me strong, we will travel, we will hunt in the deserts, we will sleep on the pavement of unknown towns, without cares or worries. Or I shall wake up and laws and customs will have changed, thanks to his magic power,—or the world, whilst remaining the same, will leave me to my own wishes, delights, and heedlessness. Oh! the life of adventures which there is in children's books, I have suffered so much, to compensate me, will you give it me? He cannot. I do not know his ideal. He has told me that he has regrets,

hopes: that cannot have anything to do with me. Does he speak to God? Perhaps I ought to address myself to God. I am at the very bottom of the abyss and I no longer know how to pray.

If he explained his sorrows to me should I understand them any better than his mockeries? He attacks me, he spends hours making me ashamed of all that could have moved me in the world and is offended if I weep. 'Do you see that elegant young man going into that fine quiet house: he is called Duval, Dufour, Armand, Maurice, I don't know what? A woman devoted herself to loving that wicked idiot: she is dead, undoubtedly a saint in heaven at this moment. It is the fate of we charitable souls.' Alas! there were days when everyone exerting themselves seemed to him the toys of grotesque delusions: he laughed long and frightfully.—Then he took up again his young mother or elder sister manner. If he were less wild we should be saved! But his sweetness also is fatal. I am at his mercy.—Ah, I am silly!

One day perhaps he will vanish mysteriously; but I must know, if he should rise again into a heaven, that I shall see something of the assumption of my little friend."

A queer couple!

DÉLIRES II

Alchemy of the Word

LISTEN. The story of one of my follies.

For a long time I had boasted that I owned all possible landscapes, and I had found the celebrities of modern poetry and painting ridiculous.

I liked idiotic paintings, fan-lights, decorations, acrobats' back-cloths, sign-boards, popular prints; old-fashioned literature, church latin, erotic books with no

spelling, our grand-parents' novels, fairy-tales, the little books of childhood, old operas, silly choruses, simple cadences.

I dreamed crusades, voyages of discovery of which there are no accounts, republics without histories, the crushing of religious wars, revolutions in customs, migrations of races and continents: I believed in all kinds of magic.

I invented the coloration of the vowels!—A black, E white, I red, O blue, U green. I ruled the position and the movement of each consonant and I flattered myself that with instinctive rhythms I had invented a poetic language accessible one day or another to all the senses. I reserved the translation.

It was at first a study. I described silences, nights, I noted the inexpressible. I fastened dizzy effects.

* * * *

Far from the birds, the herds, the villagers,
What did I drink, kneeling in this heather,
Surrounded with the tender hazel-bushes,
In a mist of afternoon sultry and green?

What could I drink in this young Oise,
—Elms without voice, grass without flowers, sky over-
cast:—

Drink from these yellow gourds far from my cherished
Hut? Some golden liquor which makes you sweat.

I made a dubious sign for an inn.
—A storm came to chase the blue. At dusk
The water of the woods sank in the virgin sand,
The wind of God flung icicles in the pools;

Weeping, I saw gold,—and could not drink.

* * * *

At four in the morning, in summer,
 The sleep of love endures.
 Among the groves dissolves
 The feasted evening's scent.

Down there in their vast workshop,
 In the sun of the Hesperides,
 Already bustle, in shirt-sleeves,
 The Carpenters.

Quiet in their mossy Deserts
 They prepare the precious panels
 Where the town
 Will paint false heavens.

O, for these Workmen, charming
 Subjects of a king of Babylon,
 Venus! leave a moment the Lovers
 Whose soul is garlanded.

O Queen of Shepherds,
 Bring to the labourers their *eau-de-vie*,
 That their powers may be in repose
 Awaiting the bathe in the sea at noon.

* * * *

The rags-and-bones of poetry played a considerable part in my word-alchemy.

I accustomed myself to simple hallucination: I saw quite freely a mosque in place of a factory, a school of drums made by the angels, coaches on the roads of the sky, a drawing-room at the bottom of a lake; monsters; mysteries; the title of a musical-comedy raised up horrors in front of me.

Then I expressed the sophistries of my magic by means of the hallucination of words!

I finished by finding the disorder of my spirit sacred.
I was inert, the prey of a slow fever. I envied the
happiness of animals,—caterpillars, which represent the
innocence of limbo, moles, the slumber of virginity.
My nature became soured. I said farewell to the
world in a sort of ballads:

Song of the Highest Tower

May they come, may they come,
The days which enchant us.

I have been so long resigned
That I forget it all.
Fears and sufferings
To the skies are gone,
And the unclean thirst
Darkens my veins.

May they come, may they come,
The days which enchant us.

Like the meadows
Left to ruin,
Spreading and overgrown
With flowers and weeds,
In the angry humming
Of filthy flies.

May they come, may they come
The days which enchant us.

I loved waste lands, scorched-up orchards, sun-bleached
shops, tepid drinks. I dragged myself into stinking
alleys and with closed eyes I offered myself to the sun,
god of fire.

"General, if there be still an old cannon on your ruined ramparts bombard us with lumps of parched earth. At the plate-glass of the splendid stores! into drawing-rooms! Make the city eat its dust. Rust the rainspouts. Fill up the boudoirs with a scalding powder of rubies. . . ."

Oh the little fly drunk from the inn urinal, in love with the borage and that a ray dissolves!

Hunger

If I have any taste, it is hardly
For more than earth and stones.
I always breakfast on air,
Rock, cinders, and iron.

Round, my hungers. Crop, hungers,
The field of sounds.
Suck the sweet venom
Of convolvulus.

Eat the stones someone breaks,
The old stones of churches;
The shingle of ancient floods,
Bread sown in grey valleys.

* * * *

The wolf cries under the leaves
Spitting out the gay feathers
Of his meal of poultry:
Like him I consume myself.

Green stuffs and fruits
Await but the gathering,
But the hedge spider
Eats only violets.

May I sleep! May I boil
 On the altars of Solomon.
 The broth flows over the rust
 And mingles with Kedron.

At last, oh happiness, oh certitude, I stripped from the sky the blue which is of darkness, and I lived, a golden spark of the radiance *nature*. Out of joy I chose a style as droll and far-fetched as possible.

I have recovered it.
 What? Eternity.
 It is the sea merged
 With the sun.

My eternal soul
 Observe your vow
 In spite of night alone
 And the fiery day.

Then you free yourself
 From human sanctions,
 From common joys!
 You soar thus. . . .

Never a hope,
 Not a petition,
 Skill and patience,
 Torment is certain.

No to-morrows,
 Satin embers,
 Your ardour
 Is Duty.

I have recovered it.
 —What? Eternity.
 It is the sea merged
 With the sun.

I became an opera of fables: I saw that all creatures are destined to a certain contentment: action is not life, but a way of dissipating a certain power, an enervation. Morality is a weakness of the intellect. It seemed to me that to each creature several other lives belonged. This gentleman does not know what he is doing: he is an angel. This family is a litter of dogs. With several men I have conversed aloud with a moment of one of their other lives. So, I have been in love with a pig.

None of the sophistries of madness,—the madness that is shut up,—has been neglected by me: I could recite them all, I hold the system. My health was threatened. Terror came. I fell into slumbers of many days and, risen, continued the saddest dreams. I was ripe for death, and by a road of dangers my weakness drew me to the frontiers of the world and of Chimmeria, the country of shadows and of whirlwinds.

I had to travel, to scatter the spells gathered in my head. On the sea, which I loved as though it should cleanse me of a stain, I saw the cross of salvation rise. I have been damned by the rainbow. Happiness was my destiny, my regret, my worm: my life should be always too vast to be devoted to strength and beauty.

Happiness! Her tooth, deathly sweet, warned me at cock-crow,—*ad matutinum*, to the *Christis venit*,—in the most sombre towns:

O seasons, O castles!
What soul is faultless?

I have made the magic study
Of happiness, that none evades.

Hail to it, each time
That the Gallic cock crows.

Ah! I shall have no more care:
It has taken charge of my life.

This charm has seized body and soul
And dispelled their struggles.
O seasons, O castles!

The hour of its flight, alas!
Will be the hour of death.
O seasons, O castles!

That is over. I know now how to acknowledge beauty.

ADIEU

AUTUMN already! But why regret the everlasting sun when we are engaged in the discovery of the divine light,—far from men who die with the seasons?

Autumn. My ship, set in the motionless fog, turns towards the port of misery, the immense city with skies stained by mud and flames. Ah! the stinking rags, the rain-soaked bread, the frenzies, the thousand loves which crucified me. She will never have an end, then, that ghoulish queen of a million dead souls and bodies, *which will be judged!* I see myself again, my skin devoured by plague and filth, with vermin my hair and armpits full and still grosser vermin in the heart, stretched among unknown men, without age or feelings. . . . I might have died there! Fearful memory! I detest squalor!

And I fear winter because it is the season for comfort! —Sometimes in the sky I see endless beaches covered with white, joyous nations. Above me, a great golden ship flutters its many-coloured pennants in the morning wind. I have created all shows, all triumphs, all dramas. I have tried to invent new flowers, new stars, new flesh, new languages. I believed myself to possess supernatural powers. Well! I must bury my imagination and my memories! A splendid fame of artist and storyteller chucked away!

I! I who called myself mage or angel, dispensed with all morality, I am thrown back to earth with a task to seek and rugged reality to get to grips with! Peasant!

Am I mistaken? Would charity be the sister of death for me?

Finally, I will ask forgiveness for having nourished myself on lies. Now let us go.
But not one friendly hand! and where shall I get help?

Yes, the new life is at best most rigorous.

For I can say that I have won: the gritting of teeth, the fire-breathing and plaguey gasps subside. All wretched memories are fading. My last regrets are sinking,—envy of beggars, thieves, friends of death, the backward of all sorts.—You damned ones, if I were to revenge myself!

I must be absolutely modern.

No hymns: hold the step won. Hard night! The dried blood smokes on my face, and I have nothing behind me but this horrible bush! . . . The spiritual battle is as brutal as the fight of men; but the vision of justice is the joy of God alone.

Nevertheless, it is the eve. Let us accept all inflows of vigour and real tenderness. And at dawn, armed with an eager patience, we shall enter splendid towns.

What did I say about a friendly hand! A fine advantage is that I can laugh at the old false passions and put to shame those lying couples,—I saw the hell of women down there;—and I shall be free *to hold the truth in a soul and a body.*

April-August 1873.

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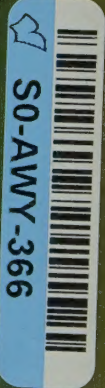


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